

Bhashani a lasting inspiration for democracy

Says Tarique

UNB, Dhaka

BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman yesterday said Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani will always remain



a source of inspiration for the nation in securing the rights of the helpless and in protecting democracy, human rights, freedom and sovereignty. "His immense patriotism, unwavering commitment to national interest, and courage to stand against enemies of democracy and humanity will inspire us for generations to come," he said in a message issued ahead of Bhashani's 49th death anniversary today. "On the occasion of the death anniversary of Maulana Abdul Hamid Khan Bhashani, the leader of the downtrodden, I pay my deep respects to his memory and pray for the salvation of his departed soul," the BNP leader said.

Calling Bhashani an unforgettable

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BGB members stand guard outside the International Crimes Tribunal yesterday, as the tribunal is set to deliver its judgment today in a case against deposed prime minister Sheikh Hasina and two of her aides.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

ICT to deliver judgment on Hasina today

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defendants' assets if convicted and distribute them among the victims' families.

The defence, however, expressed hope for their acquittal. Hasina has denied all charges.

This will be the tribunal's first verdict on the atrocities committed during the uprising.

Prosecutors said the court's delivery of the verdict is expected to be broadcast live on Bangladesh Television and private channels, subject to final approval by the tribunal.

Meanwhile, Home Adviser Jahangir Alam Chowdhury told reporters in Barishal yesterday that the government will execute the tribunal's verdict without delay.

Asked if the accused can file an appeal if found guilty, Prosecutor Tamim said a fugitive cannot avail the right to appeal while on the run.

According to the law, a convict must either be arrested or surrender to qualify for filing an appeal to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, he added.

"The appeal must be lodged within 30 days of the verdict, and the law mandates that the Appellate Division dispose of the appeal within 60 days of its filing," he told The Daily Star.

Hasina is also facing three more cases at the ICT, two over enforced disappearances and one concerning the alleged mass killings at Motijheel's Shapla Chattar in 2013.

Kamal faces two enforced disappearance cases.

Prosecutors have urged the tribunal to dispose of another July uprising-related case filed against Mamun.

On July 2, ICT-1 sentenced Hasina to six months' simple imprisonment for contempt of court over remarks made during a phone conversation with a local leader about the tribunal.

The tribunal, for months, heard testimonies alleging she ordered mass killings.

After the uprising last year, a complaint alleging crimes against humanity against Hasina was filed with the ICT investigation agency. Investigators then opened a probe and, after completing it, submitted a report to the Chief Prosecutor's Office on May 12.

The prosecution submitted a 135-page charge sheet, accompanied by 8,747 pages of documents and evidence.

Formal charges against Hasina, Kamal, and Mamun were submitted to ICT-1 on June 1. The tribunal took cognisance of the case the same day and ordered the trial to begin.

On July 10, it framed charges against the accused.

Proceedings began on August 4 with the testimony from the first prosecution witness. Of the 81 witnesses listed, 54, including former IGP Mamun and the investigation officer, testified.

After the arguments closed on October 23, the tribunal fixed November 13 for setting the judgment date. On that day, the three-member

bench, chaired by Justice Md Golam Mortuza Mozumder, set November 17 for the verdict.

THE CHARGES

Count-1 charged the defendants with murder, attempted murder, torture, and other inhumane acts. They were accused of abetting, inciting, facilitating, being complicit in, and failing to prevent crimes committed against civilians by law enforcement and armed cadres of the Awami League and its affiliates.

Count-2 charges include ordering the use of lethal weapons, helicopters, and drones to subdue student protesters, with the accused allegedly guilty of superior command responsibility, complicity, facilitation, and conspiracy.

Count-3 relates to the murder of Begum Rokeya University student Abu Sayed on July 16, where they issued orders, incited, abetted, facilitated, conspired and were complicit in the crime.

Count-4 accuses the defendants of orchestrating the murder of six unnamed protesters in the capital's Chankharpul on August 5 by direct order, incitement, abetment, facilitation, complicity, and conspiracy.

Count-5 concerns the shooting dead of five protesters and the injury of another. It also accuses the three of burning the five dead bodies and another protester alive, with the defendants allegedly involved through complicity, facilitation, and instigation.

New promises for safe food production

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More than 1,400 sub assistant agriculture officers from Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) also received training so they can assist the farmers and supervise their farming practices.

"After I obtained the GAP certificate, several Dhaka super shops contacted me and sought to buy my toxin-free vegetables. Some shops wanted to purchase my crops at prices higher than the market rate," said Ilias Sheikh, a vegetable farmer from Natore's Naladanga upazila.

He has been farming vegetables on two acres of land for 25 years, earning little profits in some seasons, and barely recouping the production cost in other seasons. This year, he grew vegetables in compliance with GAP for the first time, and made more money.

Due to their high quality and supervised production, GAP crops, vegetables and fruits are in high demand in super shops in upscale areas, said Rofiqul Islam, a supply chain manager at Meena Bazar.

"Customers buy GAP-certified products with great enthusiasm. We could have sold more of these items, but farmers are yet to be able to meet the demand," he said.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES The European countries first started GAP in 1997, and the ASEAN countries in 2006, long before Bangladesh adopted the practices.

Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) is leading the GAP initiative in Bangladesh while the DAE issues the certificate under the agriculture ministry's "Program on Agricultural and Rural Transformation for Nutrition, Entrepreneurship and Resilience in Bangladesh (PARTNER)."

The scheme is being financed through phased loans by two development partners – \$500 million from the WB and \$43 million from IFAD. The Bangladesh government is providing \$108 million, said Mahbuba Moonmoon, deputy programme director of PARTNER.

The Bangladesh GAP standard includes 246 control points under five modules, namely safe food, environmental management, worker

health, safety and welfare, produce quality, and general requirements.

Under the practices, farmers must ensure safe water for irrigation, fence their farm, provide worker facilities (toilet, resting place, handwashing), store pesticides, fertilisers equipment in separate locations, arrange health checkups of farmers, ensure record keeping and arrange a separate packaging area, according to the GAP documents.

The programme, due to end in 2028, aims to cover 300,000 hectares of land and train 10 lakh farmers across the country.

Of the 200,000 farmers trained so far, only 18 have been awarded GAP certificates after rigorous inspections between May 30, 2024, and October 2025, said Mahbuba.

Explaining the downside of traditional farming, Zakiah Rahman Moni, the principal scientific officer at BARC, said that the nutritional value of most such crops is lower than expected, mainly due to the excessive use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, which disrupts the soil's natural nutrient cycle.

"Different studies suggest that 30-40% of marketed vegetables in Bangladesh contain high levels of pesticide residues," said Zakiah, also a nutritionist.

She warned that consuming food that contain chemicals and heavy metals can lead to long-term health problems, including kidney disease, neurological disorders, and even cancer.

Asked how GAP will make a difference, she said that proper adherence to GAP ensures that the produce has no harmful chemical residues. It also retains the nutritional value of the food and the soil quality.

While experts hail GAP certification as the start of a new era for safe food production and commercial farming, they are concerned about the project's sustainability.

"The 246 control points in the Bangladesh GAP are overly complicated for farmers compared to the 190 conditions in the Global GAP standard. We suggest revising it down to the Global GAP benchmark," said Professor Abu Noman Faruq Ahmed, a GAP expert from the faculty of Plant Pathology,

Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University.

He also said that the certification in Bangladesh is currently handled by a unit under the DAE, unlike Global GAP, which uses a private, independent body.

This could potentially reduce the international market acceptability of Bangladesh GAP-certified products.

Abdus Salam, executive chairman of BARC, said they will revise GAP standards to address overlapping compliances. He also admitted that a private body would be better for certification, but they are yet to find one capable of doing the job.

"We are looking for qualified private organisations or universities that will be included as certification bodies in the future," said Salam.

On sustainability, he said they plan to continue the monitoring and certification programmes since they have already trained 1,400 agriculture officers nationwide.

According to the Bangladesh GAP policy 2020, GAP products should be marketed with their logo and detailed information at a government-fixed prices.

But branding and popularising the GAP products will require raising awareness of consumers, packaging and marketing across the country.

"We are trying to arrange some funds for publicity on the benefits of toxin-free crops and consumer awareness building," said Mahbuba Moonmoon, the deputy director of the GAP programme.

Currently, officials are digitally tracking the farmers' produce and using the Bangladesh GAP banner at the supermarkets that sell them.

This season, farmers are cultivating 16 types of toxin-free crops, vegetables and fruits under GAP on 75,000 hectares of land nationwide.

For Angur Begum, a GAP certified mango grower from Tanore upazila in Rajshahi, farming under GAP programme is more than just higher profits.

"It is true that our mangos sold at higher prices. But, as an entrepreneur, I am immensely proud that am growing safer food and it brings me a lot of respect," she said.

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He also said the country's economic and law and order situation is worsening day by day. Without an elected government, the situation will deteriorate further, he added.

Divisions among political parties deepened over several issues after the National Consensus Commission submitted its recommendations for implementing the constitutional reforms of the July charter on October 28.

The issues included the timing of the referendum on the charter, the implementation order, using a proportional representation system to form an upper house, and the notes of dissent.

On November 3, the government gave the parties seven days to reach a consensus. After the deadline expired, Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus announced a set of key decisions.

He said the national election and the referendum would be held on the same day, and an upper house would be introduced, formed through proportional representation.

Soon after the chief adviser's address, President Mohammed Shahabuddin issued the July National Charter (Constitution Reform) Implementation Order, 2025.

That night, the BNP welcomed the chief adviser's confirmation of the February 2026 election plan and the announcement that the referendum would be held on the same day.

BNP leaders said it was not fully satisfied with the government's decisions, such as the PR system for forming the upper house. The party,

however, chose a softer stance. Instead, it decided to focus fully on preparations for the next polls.

At a meeting on Friday, NCP leaders said frustration remained within the party over ambiguities in the July charter implementation order. It supported the PR system for forming the upper house, but wanted the order to be issued directly by the chief adviser.

Nevertheless, the party has continued fully-fledged preparations to contest the upcoming national election, focusing on organising its grassroots and selecting candidates for all 300 seats.

Top leaders of Jamaat, Islami Andolan Bangladesh, Bangladesh Khelafat Majlish, Khelafat Majlish, Bangladesh Khelafat Anodolan, Nezam-e-Islam Party, Jatiya Gonatantrik Party and Bangladesh Development Party sat to discuss the current political situation. Asked why they did not announce protest programmes yesterday, Rashed Pradhan, vice president and spokesperson of Jatiya Gonatantrik Party, told The Daily Star, "We reviewed the chief adviser's address at the meeting and found that several of our demands, including the order to implement the July National Charter and the introduction of the PR system for forming the upper house of parliament, have been met. That is why we did not move to announce our programme."

Maulana Yunus Ahmad, secretary general of Islami Andolan Bangladesh, told The Daily Star, "The meeting reviewed what we gained and what we did not gain from the chief adviser's speech. We saw that our gains are not insignificant."

Population control in reverse gear

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survey, is 2.4. The surveys of 2019 and 2013 put the rate at 2.3.

Asked about the possible reasons behind the recent rise, Prof Aminul Islam of the population science department at Dhaka University told The Daily Star that there has been visible reluctance in family planning in recent years, and some families now expect more than two children. "A combination of these factors likely explains the rise."

The latest survey supports his observation to some extent. It shows that the use of contraceptives by married women, aged 15 to 49, dropped to 58.2 percent from 62.7 percent in 2019.

Access to modern contraception also declined, with 73.5 percent of women's needs met, compared to 77.4 percent in 2019.

An official of the Directorate General of Family Planning said the unmet demand for contraceptives rose sharply during the pandemic. On top of this, there has been a supply and delivery disruption of contraceptives over the last year or so.

DU Prof Aminul said government policies and programmes that place less emphasis on population control need to be revised.

Ashraf Ahmad, director general of the Directorate General of Family Planning, declined to make any comments as he had not gone through the report.

POSITIVES, CONCERNS

The survey said childbirths at healthcare facilities rose to 71 percent from 53.4 percent in 2019. Rate of deliveries made by skilled healthcare personnel rose to 77 percent from 59 percent in 2019. It said antenatal care coverage improved as well.

However, deliveries via C-section rose to 51.8 percent from 36 percent in 2019.

Children, from 15 to 19 years of age, bearing children rose to 92 percent from 83 percent in 2019.

The survey shows child stunting dropped to 24 percent from 28 percent in 2019, but severe short-term undernutrition (wasting) increased from 9.8 percent in 2019 to 12.9 percent.

The mortality rate of children under 5 dropped to 33 per 1,000 live births from 40 in 2019, marking a steady but slower decline than seen in previous surveys.

Infant, one-year-olds, mortality rate improved to 29 per 1,000 live births from 34 in 2019.

At least 73 percent of the households have access to basic sanitation, up from 64.4 percent in 2019.

However, access to safe drinking water dropped to 39.3 percent from 42.6 percent in 2019. This leaves over 10.6 crore people without access to safe drinking water.

E. coli bacteria was found in nearly half of water sources surveyed and over 80 percent of samples collected from households.

Unsafe levels of lead found in 38%

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These are findings of the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2025, a comprehensive survey on children and women done by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics with technical and financial support from Unicef.

The preliminary results of the 7th round of MICS, conducted over the last one year, were released at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre yesterday.

Earlier, several organisations, including icddr,b, and Environment and Social Development Organisation (ESDO), carried out relatively small size surveys on lead poisoning, exposing its adverse health impacts on people of different age groups, including children.

Experts say that the presence of any level of lead in blood is not safe. However, the US Centres for Disease Control and

Prevention (CDC) consider BLLs above 35 micrograms per litre to be concerning, especially for young children.

Lead exposure can seriously harm a child's health, causing damage to the brain and nervous system, slowed growth and development, learning and behavioural issues, hearing and speech problems, lower IQ, decreased attention levels, and poor academic performance, according to the CDC.

For the first time in Bangladesh, the MICS included the new Blood Lead Level (BLL) Plus module. Apart from lead, the survey also analysed the presence of three other heavy metals – cadmium, arsenic, and mercury – in blood among 13,707 children (12-59 months) and pregnant women (15-49 years).

Smaller proportions showed elevated cadmium (4 percent) and arsenic (1 percent) among children, and elevated

Marjorie Taylor blames Trump for threats against her

REUTERS, Washington

Republican lawmaker Marjorie Taylor Greene accused US President Donald Trump on Saturday of putting her life in danger, saying his online criticism has triggered a wave of threats against her.

Greene, once a longtime Trump loyalist who has more recently taken positions at odds with the president, said she has been contacted by private security firms warning about her safety.

"Aggressive rhetoric attacking me has historically led to death threats and multiple convictions of men who were radicalized by the same type (of) rhetoric being directed at me right now," Greene, a US House of Representatives member from Georgia, wrote in a post on X. "This time by the President of the United States."

Trump broke with Greene on Friday night in a withering social media post in which he referred to Greene as "Wacky" and a "ranting lunatic" who complained he would not take her calls. He continued his criticism on Saturday with two more social media posts, calling her a "Lightweight Congresswoman," "Traitor" and a "disgrace" to the Republican Party.

In her first response posted on Friday, Greene accused Trump of lying about her and trying to intimidate other Republicans before a House of Representatives vote next week on releasing files related to the late financier Jeffrey Epstein, a convicted sex offender who was friendly with Trump in the 1990s and 2000s before they had a falling out.

He added that instead of making a hasty decision yesterday, the liaison committee will sit later and decide what the next course of action should be.

Besides a legal basis of the charter and PR system, they also demanded level playing field during electioneering, making visible progress in ensuring justice for all oppression, persecution, massacres, and corruption committed by the Awami League regime, and to ban the activities of the Jatiya Party.

At a press conference after the meeting, Jamaat Secretary General Mia Golam Porwar alleged that due to the "misguiding role" of three government advisers, a level playing field was still not being ensured.

He said the alliance's three demands had yet to be met, and for that reason they would continue their protests.

The alliance, however, would vote "yes" in the upcoming referendum to give a legal basis to the July charter, he added. They would also work to persuade the public to vote "yes".

Porwar said the eight parties had supported reforms from the very beginning. "But one particular party has opposed many of the key and fundamental reforms," he said. "That is why we are urging the nation to vote 'yes' in support of reform."

He also called on the government to inform the public about the referendum process.

A "force" belonging to one party had already begun campaigning for a "no" vote on digital platforms, Porwar said. "The whole nation supports reform. Those who oppose it will be rejected by the people."

Climate-related hazards impacted 10.2 percent of water sources, highlighting the need for climate-resilient infrastructure.

While primary school enrolment remains high, around 80 percent, it drops off sharply at higher levels. Many children complete primary schooling without mastering basic skills, it said.

Attending the programme, Rana Flowers, UNICEF representative to Bangladesh, said the survey comes at a critical time for Bangladesh and is a reflection of progress and challenges.

"While declines in child marriage and child mortality show what's possible, crises like lead poisoning and child labour are depriving millions of children of potential, and rising caesarean rates threaten women's health," she added.

UNICEF commits to supporting the government to turn this data into targeted action and change that leaves no child behind, she added.

Aleya Akter, secretary of Statistics and Informatics Division, said based on the data, they would work with ministries and divisions concerned.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, former adviser to a caretaker government, said the data has been provided and now the story has to be told for the betterment of children and women.

BBS Director General Mohammed Mizanur Rahman chaired the report unveiling programme held at the Bangladesh-China Friendship Conference Centre.

cadmium (3 percent) and arsenic (2 percent) among pregnant women, indicating that lead poisoning was more prevalent than the other three.

In August this year, icddr,b, along with Stanford University of US, released a study report that showed around 98 percent of 500 surveyed children aged between two and four in the capital were found to have concerning levels of lead in their blood.

ESDO last month unveiled a study report saying that many local and unregistered manufacturers produce paints containing dangerously high levels of lead.

At the event, speakers said the findings underscore the urgency of identifying sources of contamination – such as industrial emissions, informal recycling process, and unsafe consumer products.