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News Brief

The nation celebrated the 8th day program of the 10-day grand celebrations of the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Golden Jubilee of independence at the National Parade Square yesterday with the theme "Bangabandhu: Pioneer of Peace, Freedom and Humanity". Chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the program was attended by the visiting Bhutanese Premier Dr. Lotay Tshering as the special Guest of Honor. At the ceremony, video messages of Pope Francis and Indian National Congress President Sonia Gandhi were screened. Recalling the legacies of Bangabandhu in promoting respect for different traditions and communities and a culture of dialogue, the Pope wished for an abundance of divine blessings for "Golden Bangladesh" and its citizens. Sonia Gandhi, in her message, paying rich tribute to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman said, 1971 was as much a transformative year for India as it was for Bangladesh. "A year that saw Indira Gandhi in all her magnificence as a political leader and statesman soon thereafter Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself emerged on the world stage as the leader of a free people. Messages of Prime Minister of Italy Sergio Mattarella and President European Council Charles Michel were also read out at function." To join the grand celebrations, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will arrive here tomorrow on a two-day official visit. During his visit, Bangladesh and India will sign a number of agreements in disaster management, trade and oceanography sectors, Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla said at a special media briefing in New Delhi yesterday. Moreover, India will have a new announcement to make in the areas of culture, preservation of 1971 spirit and cooperation in health and power sectors during the high level visit, Shringla said.

Bhutanese Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering addressing the twin mega celebrations at the National Parade Ground yesterday terming the country's economic progress "highly commendable" said, Bangladesh has progressed at all levels. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Bangladesh has been able to retain one of the highest GDP growths in the continent, Dr. Lotay Tshering said. Terming Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina 'an inspiring leader' and 'a mother-like figure' for him, he said, "...Bangladesh is truly blessed to have her. I am sure Sheikh Mujibur Rahman is proud of Bangladesh today and of course, his daughter." Paying deep tribute to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he said, Bangabandhu laid strong foundations for a peaceful, progressive, and prosperous Bangladesh. He said, this year is also special as Bhutan has enjoyed 50 years of bilateral ties with Bangladesh.

While presiding over the function, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, pointing out that the people of South Asia possess unbelievable spirit, innovation, and the ability to survive against natural disasters, urged the political leaders and policymakers of this region to work in unison for the betterment of the people saying, South Asia will surely be flourished as one of the most prosperous regions in the world. The Premier said, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib respectful to the peaceful co-existence and regional integrity, and he believed that any problem could be solved through mutual cooperation," she said.

Bangladesh and Bhutan agreed to activate the river routes to expand business between the two countries as Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Bhutanese counterpart Dr. Lotay Tshering met at the Prime Minister's Office in the capital yesterday. The Premier Sheikh Hasina asked the authorities concerned to build necessary infrastructure needed for the preferential trade agreement-PTA signed between the two countries and to build more ports of call where the ships anchor to facilitate trade and commerce. During the meeting, both the Premiers agreed to work in unison at the UN and different international forums. The Bangladesh Premier also asked the authorities concerned to prepare a MoU on setting up a hydropower plant with bilateral and trilateral cooperation involving India. The Bhutanese Premier requested the Bangladesh Premier to provide full-term visa to his country's students with multiple entry facilities. In response, the Bangladesh Premier ordered the concerned authorities to look into the matter. Earlier, the two Prime Ministers held a tête-à-tête.

Dhaka and Thimphu can explore new areas of cooperation including information and communication technology, agriculture, horticulture, tourism and fisheries to enhance trade and investment between the two friendly countries. President Md. Abdul Hamid said this when the visiting Bhutanese Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering paid a courtesy call on him at Bangabhaban last afternoon. The President mentioned that Bangladesh has an excellent bilateral relation with Bhutan and the existing relation is strengthening day by day. The Bhutanese Premier lauded Bangladesh's

tremendous progress in different sectors, especially in socio-economic sector and women empowerment, under the charismatic leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The nation observes Genocide Day today, commemorating the barbaric mass killing committed by the Pakistani occupation forces on the night of March 25 in 1971. The government and political, social and cultural organizations have drawn up various programs to observe the day with due respect. President Md. Abdul Hamid in his message issued on the eve of the day emphasized on collective efforts to turn the country into 'Sonar Bangla' as dreamt by Bangabandhu as part of paying everlasting respect to the martyrs of the 1971 genocide. On the eve of the birth centenary of the Father of the Nation and the golden jubilee of the country's independence, the President said, "I call upon all, irrespective of party affiliation, to contribute from their respective positions in the implementation of these programs".

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in her message said, "On the eve of the golden jubilee of our great independence, we mourn in a heart-rending sorrow all the martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the black-night on 25th March 1971, whose spills of fresh blood inspired to taking the oath by the brave Bengalis to hold arms and fight till the independence." The greatest Bengali of all time, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman led the Bengali liberation struggle from the forefront throughout his life, the Prime Minister said.

The government has taken programs to celebrate golden jubilee of country's Independence and National Day tomorrow with due respect. The day's programs will begin by heralding a 50-gun salute early in the morning as a mark of profound respect to the heroic struggle of the nation. The National Memorial at Savar will be the main venue of the celebration of the day where President Md. Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will place wreaths early in the morning as a mark of profound respect to the memories of the martyrs. The national flag will fly atop all government and private buildings while all streets and important city intersections will be decorated with national and multi-coloured miniature flags and festoons. Along with the government, different political parties as well as socio-cultural and professional organizations have taken various programs to observe the day in a befitting manner.

The nation will celebrate the ninth day of the ten-day program of the Birth Centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and golden jubilee of Independence with the theme 'Gonohotta Kalratro o Aloker Avijatra' at the National Parade Square in the city today. Lawmaker Asaduzzaman Noor will moderate the function. Liberation War Museum Trustee Mofidul Haque will take part in a discussion on the theme. At the discussion session, recorded video messages of South Korean Prime Minister Chung Sye-kyun and Bangladesh' Japanese friend Takasi Hawakawa's son Osamu Hawakawa will be played. At the cultural function, a recorded cultural function of South Korea will be played.

The government is planning to construct an underground railway network with a view to easing traffic congestion in the capital city, Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader said while virtually speaking at a seminar at a city hotel yesterday. He also said, the Padma Multipurpose Bridge will be opened for the vehicular movement by June 2022 as 92.50 per cent construction works of the main bridge have been completed while the overall progress is over 84 per cent. Construction progress of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman tunnel, being constructed under the river Karnophuly in Chattogram is 65 per cent, he added. Spanish Ambassador Francisco de Asís Benitez Salas, among others, attended the seminar.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal during his visit to the fire ravaged Rohingya camp at Balukhali in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar yesterday warned that if involvement of Rohingyas is found in the probe report, they would be brought to book. "Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has given you shelter. She (Prime Minister) is with you and the government is doing everything for your safe repatriation," he said. Meanwhile, International Organization for Migration-IOM estimated that about US\$ 20 million more is required to respond to the urgent needs of displaced Rohingyas created due to the devastating fire.

Information and Broadcasting Minister Dr. Hasan Mahmud while addressing the triennial conference of Sapahar upazila Awami League of Naogaon district through video conference yesterday said, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir has raised a question – 'why the Indian Premier is coming to Bangladesh?' In fact, the BNP and Jamaat, especially BNP, have made their position clear by raising the question that they are instigating those who are against Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Dhaka, he added. The Minister said, BNP could not back from its anti-India politics. Bangladesh needs good relations with the neighbors for the progress of the country, he opined.

The Cabinet Committee on Government Purchase-CCGP in a virtual meeting yesterday chaired by Finance Minister A H M Mustafa Kamal approved six proposals, involving an overall estimated cost of around Taka 1,493.49 crore, including two separate ones, for procuring 33.60 lakh MMBtu LNG with a cost of around Taka 218.07 crore and 50,000 tons of non-basmati boiled rice with a cost of around Taka 177.11 crore. Prior to the CCGP meeting, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs chaired by the Finance Minister approved a proposal in principle from the Ministry of Shipping to follow the Direct Procurement Method instead of the PPP model for conducting the capital and maintenance dredging operations at Rabnabad channel in Payra Port.

Meanwhile, with 25 more deaths yesterday, the number of deaths from Covid-19 in Bangladesh rose to 8,763. At the same time recovery count rose to 5,27,909. With the detection of 3,567 new cases, the total number of Covid-19 cases rose to 5,80,808. A total of 78,817 people were administered COVID-19 vaccines across the country yesterday, giving rise to the total number of vaccine receivers to 50,69,049. As many as 64,52,978 people got registered till 2.30pm yesterday to receive the vaccine.

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