

## Mamata, Hasina talk culture and education

Top honour: Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina being conferred with 'Doctor of Literature (honoris causa)' by Vice Chancellor Sadhan Chakraborty, right, and State Education Minister Partha Chatterjee at Kazi Nazrul University. PTIPTI

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who completed her two-day visit to West Bengal on Saturday, emphasised the cultural ties between Bengal and Bangladesh but maintained silence on the crucial issue of sharing of Teesta river water.

On the second and last day of Ms. Hasina's visit, West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee met Ms. Hasina for about 40 minutes. Ms. Banerjee was asked about the Teesta issue following her meeting, but she did not comment on it.

### 'Improving relations'

"We discussed issues relating to culture and education, and how to improve relations between two countries," Ms. Banerjee told presspersons. The Bangladesh PM, who attended two public events during the day, emphasised India's support to the Bangladesh war of independence.

Akin to what she had said at Visva-Bharati University on Friday, Ms. Hasina said that Bangladesh had provided shelter to over a million Rohingya people from Myanmar, and that she wants an early settlement to the issue.

At the Netaji Research Bureau, where authorities had said that Ms. Hasina would take questions from media, the Prime Minister did not entertain any questions. "She is one hour behind schedule, and before meeting Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, she does not want any wrong signals sent," a key organiser of the event at Netaji Bhavan told journalists.

Political observers feel that the Teesta may have figured in the talks between Ms. Hasina and Ms. Banerjee, but they may not want to go public with the issue, which remains sensitive to both sides of the border.

The West Bengal Chief Minister proposed setting up a museum on 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Kolkata. "If both countries agree and give us the permission, we will do it," she said.

On the proposal by Bangladesh to restore the Aurobindo Bhavan located in central Kolkata, which served as the first office of the Bangladesh Government in 1971, Ms. Banerjee said that the matter can be taken up with the trust that has jurisdiction over the property.

Earlier in the day, the Bangladesh PM, while receiving an honorary D. Litt. from Kazi Nazrul University in Asansol, emphasised the "secular" mindset of Kazi Nazrul Islam, the national poet of Bangladesh.

"Nazrul was inspired by a secular way of thinking and we are trying to take Bangladesh forward on a similar line of secular thinking. Everyone there [in Bangladesh] enjoys equal rights, regardless of religion and caste," Ms. Hasina said.

### 'Poverty and terrorism'

She also said that her government was striving to rid Bangladesh of poverty and terrorism, besides protecting youth from the menace of drug abuse. Ms. Hasina said poverty was the main

enemy and a barrier to development not only in Bangladesh, but across the subcontinent.

“We want to transform Bangladesh from a developing nation to a developed nation soon,” she said, while expressing hope for a strong and everlasting Indo-Bangla friendship. Her country had steadily improved its literacy rate, from 66% in 2009 to 72% now, Ms. Hasina said. She also sought cooperation from all the countries in the subcontinent in putting an end to militant activities.

( *With PTI inputs* )

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