

Francis is the second pope to visit Bangladesh

Bangladesh rolled out the red carpet as Pope Francis, the leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics, arrived at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in Dhaka on a three-day state visit.

A 21-gun salute heralded the arrival of the 80-year-old Pope Francis when he alighted from a VVIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines Thursday afternoon, wrapping up his three-day Myanmar visit, at around at 3:05pm.

President M Abdul Hamid received the Pope near the VVIP Tarmac of the airport, while two tiny tots presented him a bouquet.

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A smartly turned out contingent drawn from Bangladesh Army, Navy and Air Force gave a guard of honour and state salute to the highest catholic priest while accompanied by the president Pope Francis he took the salute from a makeshift "Saluting Dais" after inspecting the guard.

Francis is the second pope to visit Bangladesh. Pope John Paul II visited Bangladesh back in 1986.

Pope Francis arrived in Dhaka at the invitation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Catholic Bishop's Conference of Bangladesh.

Thereafter, Abdul Hamid introduced cabinet members and other dignitaries to Pope Francis at the presentation line.

Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Agriculture Minister Begum Matia Chowdhury, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, and Law Minister Anisul Haque, were also present at the airport to welcome the Pope.

Besides, Cabinet Secretary M Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, the chiefs of three services, PM's senior secretary Suriya Begum, Vatican City Ambassador to Bangladesh George Kocherry and Inspector General of Police (IGP) M Sohikul Haque were, among others, present.

From the airport, Pope is scheduled to visit National Martyr's Memorial at Savar to pay his rich tribute to the memories of the 1971 martyrs at 4pm and also Farther of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by placing wreaths at his portrait at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum at 32 Dhanmondi.

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In the evening, Pope will meet with President Hamid at Bangabhaban where he will join a meeting with Speaker, Chief Justice, ministers, politicians, civil society members and diplomats at Darbar Hall.

He will also sign a visitor's Book at the Credential Hall in the President's palace. Meanwhile,

an intensified security measures were taken centering the visit of the Catholic priest to Bangladesh.