

Bangladesh keen on deepening ties with Turkey

Says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Bangladesh was keen to boost its relations with Turkey for mutual benefits as it was deeply rooted in shared history, faith and traditions based on trust and confidence.

She was opening Bangladesh's embassy complex in Ankara from the Gono Bhavan virtually.

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu and his Bangladeshi counterpart AK Abdul Momen also spoke at the programme.

Hasina said Bangladesh attaches great importance to its relations with Turkey.

Recalling her visit to Ankara at the invitation of then prime minister and now President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on April 13, 2012, the PM said the formal diplomatic ties between the two countries began in 1974.

She thanked the government and the people of Turkey for extending support to Bangladesh on various issues, including the Rohingya crisis.

"All the support you extended for [resolving] the Rohingya crisis, we also thank you for your support.... I think it has been nearly three years [since the crisis broke out]. So, Rohingya people should go back to their own country. I feel Turkey can play a pivotal role in this regard."

About Covid-19, the premier said the world is passing through a difficult time due to the pandemic as it has battered the health system and the economies of most countries of the world.

Hasina said Bangladesh has been able to successfully contain the spread of the virus.

She commended Turkish leadership for its success in fighting the pandemic and appreciated its initiative to dispatch medical supplies to different countries, including Bangladesh.

The PM said Bangladesh is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. After showing some initial sluggishness for a month or two due to the pandemic, the country's exports have started making a turnaround from July.

"...we are overcoming the situation. The country's foreign currency reserve now stands at a record \$39.40 billion. We are on the right path to graduate from LDC to a developing country," she said.

Talking about the newly-built Embassy Complex, Hasina said it took less than two years to complete the construction of the embassy building with the help of the Turkish and Bangladeshi authorities concerned.

The spacious complex has all facilities along with a beautiful auditorium. It proudly hosts a bust of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and a Shahid Minar.

The PM said Bangladesh is set to expand its global outreach by establishing many more diplomatic offices to achieve vision 2021 and 2041.

"This permanent embassy complex in Ankara is a testimony to the priority Bangladesh attaches to boost further its friendship with Turkey. The recently built Turkish embassy building in Dhaka also demonstrates the same sentiment."

She hoped the formal opening of the Turkish embassy building in Dhaka would also take place soon with the presence of President Erdogan during the ongoing Mujib Borsho.

"Please convey my invitation to the president and the first lady," Hasina requested the Turkish foreign minister.

She also thanked Turkey for repairing a Bangladeshi Navy ship which was damaged in the recent blast in Lebanon.



Dusts have gathered on furniture inside a classroom of Nabadiganta High School in the capital's Adabar area. The school has remained closed since the pandemic hit the country in March.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Industrialists not interested

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Rouf, also a member of the technical committee, said, "We have had experiences with leasing out the entire mills. Some industrialists tried to grab or misuse the land."

But the potential investors are not too eager to take the lease under such terms.

Md Zahid Miah, chairman of Bangladesh Jute Spinners Association (BJS), said the government should lease out the mills for about 99 years.

"We need time and funds to replace the machineries. After restarting the mills with the new machineries, we will have to assess the market and diversify our products accordingly. It will take a long time to make profit. Without a considerably long-term contract, the investors will not be interested in taking the risk," he said.

The government closed all 25 jute mills of the BJMC on July 1 after years of losses. A 13-member technical committee was formed on July 16 to recommend ways for reopening the units in accordance with the national and global market demands.

Jute and Textiles Minister Golam Dastagir Gazi on June 28 announced that the mills would be shut down and 24,886 of its workers would be laid off in the process.

The rationale behind the decision was excessive production cost in these mills due to the workers' wages, which constituted 60-63 percent of the production costs.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, Mohammed Mahbubur Rahman Patwari, chairman of Bangladesh Jute Mills Association (BJMA), said the government should make provisions so that the investors can get bank loans on easy terms, like allowing interest-free loans for 10 years.

"Modernising these factories, most of which have been left unreformed

for over 50 years, will require a lot of funds. It is not possible for us to invest such a large amount without bank loans," he said.

The industry leaders are also not very interested in public private partnership (PPP).

BJS Chairman Zahid said, "Our past experience with PPP is not very comforting. PPP will come with its bureaucratic tangles that will slow down the progress of modernisation and could result in wastage of funds that the private sector cannot afford."

The government plans to go for government to government (G2G) agreement to modernise the factories is also uncertain.

In 2016, the BJMC and China Textile Industrial Corporation for Foreign, Economic and Technical Cooperation signed an agreement to modernise and diversify production systems in the state-run Karim Jute Mills in Dhaka, Amin Jute Mills in Chattogram and Platinum Jubilee Jute Mills in Khulna.

According to that agreement, with Chinese cooperation, these jute mills were to produce viscose fibre and various other non-traditional jute-based products like expensive car-dashboards, linen cloths, car seat covers and curtains.

The agreement could not materialise. The BJMC chairman said when he assumed the office, the decision that BJMC would gradually stop production in these mills to minimise heavy financial losses was already made.

"So, we could not proceed with that project. Since we have not decided on the method of reopening yet, the options for government to government agreement are still open," BJMC Chairman Md Abdur Rouf said.

However, experts are emphasising on exploring alternative methods of breathing new life to the jute sector.

"These large jute mills should be replaced by smaller and medium privately run mills. The machineries of the closed jute mills can be sold out to the entrepreneurs so that they can start small jute mills in various parts of the country," said Khondaker Golam Moazzem, research director at Centre for Policy Dialogue.

"And, the existing infrastructure and lands can be handed over to BEPZA and BEZA who can establish economic zones to attract businesses to invest in different industries," he said.

For instance, jute mills in Chattogram can be lucrative locations for heavy industries due to its proximity to the port while Jute mills in Dhaka and Narayanganj can make way for consumer product-based industries, he said.

"Special allocations for jute and agro-based industries can also be made in these economic zones. This way, the government can initiate massive industrialisation while rehabilitating the jute industry as well," said the research director of CPD, who has been researching the jute sector for decades.

Prof Dr M M Akash of Dhaka University's economics department, said the government could lease the factories out to workers' and employees' unions on performance contracts. To do so, the government should ensure easy access to loans to.

The workers, who suffered under an inefficient BJMC administration, will automatically boost production for their own good, he said.

"For overhauling the mills, the government to government agreement is also a viable option because the process requires massive investments. However, it has to be ensured that the agreement is done on equitable terms."

Threats send prisons

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According to sources, IG prison AKM Mustafa Kamal Pasha in the letter mentioned that the main responsibility of the officers and employees of all prisons is to be strict in any accident, including the escape of prisoner, by thwarting the misdeeds of miscreants. But, there has been evidence of lax security recently witnessed in some prisons, read the letter.

The prison chief further asked the officials to remain alert and issued an 18-point instruction to ensure security of all prisons.

The instructions include the formation of a striking force consisting of a deputy jailer, a chief jail guard and five jail guards in each jail to be ready to prevent any possible attack.

At the outer gate of the jail, prisons guards were instructed to wear bullet proof jackets and helmets and to use metal detectors to check visitors.

The IG also instructed to use armed sentries and ensure security of weapons and arsenals.

He further requested for necessary

exercises to be organised so that arms and ammunition can be procured quickly from the prison arsenal at any required moment.

The boundary walls around prisons should be secured and the alarm systems should be checked and prepared. In prisons where militants are being kept as inmates, the police authority should be informed about their incidents and the jail authority have been asked to maintain constant contact with law enforcers, read the letter.

Earlier in 2014, miscreants snatched three top JMB militants from police at Trishal on their way to a Mymensingh court. Of the three convicts, Salauddin Ahmed alias Salehin is still absconding and is believed to be hiding somewhere in India.

Almost five hours into the incident, another convict Rakib Hasan Russell alias Hafez Mahmud was captured in Tangail. He was killed in a "shootout" with law enforcers in Mirzapur upazila, police claimed.

Another accused Zahidul Islam alias "Boma" was arrested in 2018.

Wasa MD not complying

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organisation Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh (HRPB) in May 2010 seeking necessary directives to seal off drains and sewerage lines connected to the Buriganga to protect it from pollution.

The bench set October 18 as the date to pass further orders on this issue.

HRPB's lawyer Manzill Murshid told The Daily Star that the Wasa MD had appeared before the HC bench on March 4 this year and apologised for not implementing the 2011 directives.

The MD had submitted an undertaking to the HC saying that he would take steps to fully comply with the directives.

However, Taqsem had submitted three confusing reports to the HC on August 18, September 7 and yesterday through his lawyer Umme Salma.

In the reports, he said Wasa has sealed off four sewerage lines at Hazaribagh area but cannot seal off lines in Shyampur due to floods. But there is no flooding in Shyampur, Murshid, also the president of HRPB, said.

He added that the Wasa MD in a report had said his office could not implement the directives due to a manpower crisis.

During today's hearing, Murshid told the HC that pollution of Buriganga's

water is not being stopped due to noncompliance of the HC's 2011 directives.

Dhaka Wasa has failed to discharge its duty in saving the Buriganga from pollution, he argued.

On December 2 last year, the HC bench ordered Dhaka Wasa to properly implement its directives and to submit the progress report.

On the same day, Dhaka Wasa submitted an undertaking to the HC that said it would seal off all its drains and sewerage lines connected to the Buriganga and would file a progress report every month.

He submitted a report before the HC on December 2, saying that there were 67 underground drains and sewerage lines connected to the river. But on June 18 last year, he reported that no such lines were there.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) had earlier submitted a compliance report to the HC bench stating that 68 underground drains and sewerage lines were linked to the Buriganga.

On December 2 last year, the HC bench observed that Dhaka Wasa was responsible for controlling the 68 underground drains and sewerage lines and Dhaka city corporations were responsible for the surface pipelines.

Laid-off jute workers

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We've finalised discussions with the relevant offices. We are starting this payment programme with the workers of Karim Jute Mills tomorrow [today]," said Md Abdur Rouf, chairman of BJMC.

"We shall pay all the workers of every jute mill one by one throughout this month," he said.

BJMC and ministry sources informed that the ministry is going to pay two months' salaries in lieu of notice, one week's due wages from last June and unpaid festival allowances for the Bengali New Year.

Besides, 612 retired workers and 2,625 substitute workers will also receive their due wages and benefits.

The finance ministry has allocated Tk 80.79 crore for this purpose.

The due wages and benefits of the workers will be sent directly to their

bank accounts.

On July 3, the Textiles and Jute minister at a press briefing announced that all the workers will receive their due wages from the previous months, two months' wages in lieu of notice and other financial benefits according to the recommendations of the national productivity and wage commission 2015.

Every worker will get 50 percent of the total wages and all sorts of benefits to their bank accounts and the remaining 50 percent will be disbursed through Savings Instruments.

In total, 8,954 retired workers (since 2014) and 24,886 laid off workers of the state run jute mills will receive their due wages and other financial benefits. A fund of Tk 5,000 crore was promised to be allocated in this regard.

Biman may stay caged

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The chairman of the Biman board of directors is Sajjadul Hassan, former senior secretary of the Prime Minister's Office. Secretaries of different ministries form the majority of the 13-member Biman Board.

Moreover, 100 percent of Biman's shares are owned by the government.

A high-placed official of the Civil Aviation Ministry yesterday told The Daily Star that thus far, the ministry informally had the authority in forming and dissolving the Biman board, the highest authority when it comes to taking decisions about Biman.

"But the cabinet today [Monday], while approving the draft of Bangladesh Biman Corporation (Repeal) Bill, 2020, included a provision, formally empowering the ministry in this regard," said the official, who preferred not to be named.

He also said while Biman will be operated under the Companies Act, the power to dissolve and reorganise the board of directors will remain in the hands of the government.

Besides, the ministry will have the authority to take any action against Biman.

According to the draft Bangladesh Biman Corporation (Repeal) Act, the government will be able to take necessary steps for efficient management regardless of what remains in the Companies Act.

The ministry will be able to dissolve the board and have the power to terminate, change and amend contracts of different management treaties of Biman.

Talking to The Daily Star, Senior Secretary Mohibul Haque said as Biman is a government-owned company, it will be controlled by the relevant ministry.

He said there are several companies under Petro Bangla and Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation which are also controlled or run by the relevant department.

"As there is no such department to run Biman, the Civil Aviation Ministry will look after it," said Mohibul Haque.

Aviation experts and a former managing director and CEO of

Biman said the government's move does not match with the spirit of the Companies Act.

"Biman is a commercial organisation and the government should not interfere in running its activities," said a former MD of Biman, wishing anonymity.

When turning Biman into a PLC, it was decided that Biman would gradually offload all its shares to the public. But in the last 13 years, Biman could not do so and all shares remain in the hands of the government.

According to the Companies Act, the annual general meeting is the highest decision-making body and the shareholders take policy-related decisions there.

But the government owns all the shares in the national airliner. Although Biman is a public limited company, all shares remain in the hands of the government and, showing various grounds, the government is not off-loading the share, observers said.

So far, Biman has been operated in accordance with the 1977 ordinance. The High Court, however, declared illegal all ordinances, rules and regulations issued during the military regime between August 15, 1975 to April 11, 1979.

But later, in another HC rule in 2013, a few ordinances, including the Biman one, were kept active and the government was asked to enact a fresh law in this regard, Mohibul Haque told The Daily Star.

When transforming Biman into a public limited company in 2007, a section was added in the Biman ordinance 1977.

Mohibul Haque said as Biman will run according to the Companies Act, the government has moved to repeal the 1977 ordinance.

Although the Bangladesh Biman Corporation Ordinance 1977 is being repealed, the relevant functions described in the ordinance is bestowed upon the company, said Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam at a press briefing after the meeting.

Aviation experts and a former managing director and CEO of

In yesterday's meeting, the cabinet also approved a draft of the Local Government (City Corporation) (Amendment) Bill, 2020 under which election to any city corporation will have to be held within three months instead of the existing six months before the expiry of its tenure.

"Six months or 180 days is a long time... Even after taking oath, they [elected representatives] have to wait to take over charge. So, the bill was placed bringing a change to it. Now, the election will have to be held within three months [90 days]," said Khandker Anwarul Islam.

As per the draft law, he said, charge will be handed over to the newly-elected representatives within 15 working days after they take oath.

"They [newly-elected representatives] will have to sit in their maiden meeting within 15 days after taking oath and thus the former corporation will be abolished with the arrangement of the meeting," he said.

According to the proposed law, mayors and councillors of city corporations will be able to enjoy a one-month leave every year instead of the existing three months.

US, Iran battle over sanctions at world court

AFP, The Hague

The United States and Iran faced off at the UN's top court yesterday in the latest round of a battle over sanctions on Tehran reimposed by President Donald Trump.

Tehran dragged Washington to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague in 2018 after Trump pulled the US out of a landmark international nuclear deal with Iran.

They will argue over the coming week about whether the court, set up after World War II to deal with disputes between UN member states, actually has jurisdiction in the case.

26 KILLED IN LIBYA

Human trafficker suspect denied bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court has rejected two separate bail petitions Kamal Uddin alias Haji Kamal, suspected leader of a human trafficking gang, in two cases filed over the killing of 26 Bangladeshis in Libya on May 28.

The bench of Justice Jahangir Hossain Selim and Justice Md Badruzzaman passed the rejection order on Sunday considering that Haji Kamal's bail petitions were not moved properly before it, Deputy Attorney General Dr Md Bashir Ullah told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said that Kamal, suspected leader of a human trafficking gang, was shown arrested on June 30 this year in two cases filed over the killing.

One of the cases was filed on June 2 with Paltan Police Station against 38 named and 35 unnamed people for their alleged involvement with trafficking a number of people to Libya, including the 26 who were killed on May 28.

The other case was filed on June 5 with the same police station against 36 named people, including Kamal, and 30 unnamed people over the same offences.

A Rab team arrested him from the capital's Shahjadpur on June 2. Lt Col Rakibul Hasan, commanding officer of Rab-3, had said that Kamal had trafficked more than 400 people to Libya over the last decade.

Bashir Ullah said accused Kamal recently filed the bail petition with the HC through his lawyer Golam Kibria, who appeared for Kamal during the virtual hearing on the petition on Sunday.

Ex-husband hurls acid on woman, her mother

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Following a feud over divorce, a man allegedly threw acid on his former wife and mother-in-law in Kushtia's Bheramara on Sunday night, said police.

Doctors said both the victims suffered five percent burns to their bodies and were out of danger.

Shahjahan Ali, father of victim Mina Khatun, 22, said Rintu Ali, of Golnagar village of the upazila, married his daughter in 2018. Last year, Mina came to know that Rintu, an alleged drug addict, was already married and had three children.

In March last year, Mina divorced Rintu. At this, he started threatening her, he said.

Officer-in-Charge of Bheramara Police Station Shah Jalal told The Daily Star that Rintu allegedly harassed Mina over phone and was seen roaming around her house.

On Sunday night, Rintu went inside her home and hid in a corner. When Mina was talking to her mother Baby Khatun around 8:00pm, he threw acid at them and ran away, he said.

The two victims were rushed to Bheramara Upazila Health Complex, where they were being treated yesterday.

The OC said a case was filed in this connection and that they were trying to arrest the Rintu.

India bans

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imported, and prices were going up as floods damaged crops.

The report also suggested that the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB) go for imports to increase stocks, sell onions in the domestic market, address problems related to transportation, and strengthen monitoring.

Last year, India imposed an export ban on September 29, causing prices of the key cooking ingredient to skyrocket to a historic high of Tk 250 per kg in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh passes

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the second position with 4,846,427 cases recorded as of yesterday while Bangladesh is the 15th highest country of total confirmed cases.

As 1,812 people were tested positive for the viral infection in those 24 hours, the positivity rate stands at 12.75 percent against a total of 14,216 samples tested, according to the directorate general of health services (DGHS) press release.

With this, the total number of confirmed cases rose to 3,39,332.

Four of the yesterday's deceased were females and 22 were males while 25 of them died in hospitals and one at home.

Two of them were aged between 31 and 40, three between 41 and 50, 11 between 51 and 60 and the rest 10 were above 60 years.

One of them was from Rangpur division, two from Rajshahi, four from Chattogram and the highest 19 were from Dhaka division, according to the press release.

A total of 3,195 people were undergoing treatment in general beds while 295 ICU beds in the Covid-19 dedicated hospitals across the country as of yesterday morning.