

Take stringent steps to curb smuggling

Hasina tells BDR members

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called upon the BDR members to play a stronger role in combating smuggling by taking stringent measures against the illegal trade.

"You have to contribute more effectively to checking smuggling for rapid economic development," she said addressing the sector commanders of the border guards at the BDR Headquarters yesterday.

The Prime Minister praised BDR for their recent success in anti-smuggling drive but said that a huge quantum of goods are being smuggled through the border causing fatal damage to the economy.

Referring to trafficking of women and children, she said stern action must be taken to stop such activities so that the culprits are tried and given exemplary punishment under existing law.

She asked BDR members to invigorate their activities in order to

curb trafficking of women and children.

Referring to various demands of the BDR force, the Prime Minister said the government has already taken necessary steps for solving their problems and for the welfare.

Besides increasing facilities for BDR, she said, the government has also taken steps for making infrastructural development.

After the completion of first phase of the infrastructure development programmes one border headquarter, one sector and two battalions will be installed and after the completion of the total project the manpower of BDR will increase by 22,000.

With the inclusion of new 22,000 members the strength of BDR will stand at 60,000, she added.

Home Minister Mohammed Nasim and Director General of BDR Major General A M Fazlur Rahman were present.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina receiving the Personality Award 2000 from Dr Esmat EL Merghany, president of Afro Asian Lawyers Federation for Human Rights at ICC in the city yesterday.

Transfer of power soon: PM

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personalities for the year 2000 for her contribution to human rights from the continent of Asia," Dr Merghany said.

"As a leader she has earned international recognition and as the daughter of the father of the nation of Bangladesh Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, she would indeed have made him proud as she has her nation," she said handing over the international award.

Accepting the award on behalf of the people of Bangladesh, the Prime Minister said human rights in any country could be attained through gaining political democracy and sustainable improvement in socioeconomic condition of the people.

"Our respect for and protection of human rights is not a vague commit-

ment to certain principles, but it is a commitment for which we have devoted our lives," she said. "Our commitment for sustainable improvement in socioeconomic condition of our people is also based upon sacrifices of our martyrs that make this commitment so important to us."

Referring to her struggle for democracy and voting rights, peace and improvement in socioeconomic status of the commoners, she said: "I am a strong proponent of peace, freedom, human rights, development and democracy. I always speak out against oppression and violation of human rights."

institutional basis of democracy.

"Now to carry that process ahead and reassert her faith in democracy she has decided to hand over power to a neutral caretaker government to conduct the next general election in Bangladesh for a peaceful change of government," the Afro Asian Federation President said.

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Amnesty offered

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dented the image of the hill people. It will take a long time to repair the damage," he said.

Meanwhile, Chittagong Divisional Commissioner Mobaiddul Islam told the press that they were expecting release of the hostages "any moment."

Speaking at the routine press briefing here, he, however, said despite continued talks it was not yet decided "how, where and exactly when" the hostages would be released. Islam said the officials had now specific proof of "good health" of the three captives as of Wednesday evening when they received a letter signed by the three.

The letter came in response to some queries sent to the hostages by the officials through the intermediaries.

Security sources, requesting anonymity, said the hostages in their joint letter urged the officials to accept their demands for ransom and withdrawal of army cordon.

They said the kidnappers sent a separate letter on Tuesday with a new proposal asking the government to give them another safe passage from Betchhari to Kalapahar in the forest and named a place for direct talks ahead of the release of the hostages.

The Divisional Commissioner, however, declined to comment on the issue at the briefing.

However, journalists were told that the officials had dispatched an audiocassette to the kidnappers' hideout through intermediaries with an appeal by Danish hostage Mikkel Torben's six-year-old son from Denmark.

A translation in Chakma language of the cassette was also sent with the original one calling for release of the captives.

The first secretary of the UK mission in Dhaka Krish Shute, who spoke at the Kawkhali meeting, also made an appeal for the release of the foreign nationals on humanitarian grounds.

British hostage negotiation experts David Rayon and John Croford and Danish expert M. Wilberd and local army Zonal Commander Lieutenant Colonel Ashraf and director of KAMPSAX, the Danish firm for which the three were working, were present at the Kawkhali rally attended by a number of tribesmen.

Torben Mikkelsen and Nils Hulgaard of Denmark and Tim Selby of Britain, three road-building consultants, were abducted at gunpoint on February 16 from Naniarchar.

Hostels for female garments workers in city soon

BSS, Dhaka

Housing Fund, an innovative project of the present government for sheltering homeless people, will construct five two-block buildings at Badda and Dakkhin Khan in near future to provide housing to the women workers of garment factories.

A proposal to this effect has already been approved by the Trustee Board of Housing Fund empowering BRAC, a leading NGO of the country, to construct the hostel buildings at a total cost of Taka 14.14 crore, Fund's manager Mohammad Shahjahan told BSS yesterday.

This step has been undertaken as per the personal wish of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. As many as 2,000 women garment workers, unmarried, widow or deserted by their husbands and earning low wages, will get the housing facilities in these buildings.

Parents

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to buy them a motorbike. When I refused, they demanded my son's motorbike," he said.

He said the hoodlums also went to my brother's shop and demanded Tk. 5,000 as toll. "My brother gave them Tk. 1,000."

When asked, Mia Chand also gave the names of a number of other local miscreants who might have been involved in the killing. They include Mesbah, Selim, Saidul, his brother Taizul and Baker, brother of Bablu.

When contacted last night, investigation officer of the case Sub-Inspector Md Quiyum claimed that they did everything to rescue the body.

The OC of Keraniganj thana claimed that Munna was killed following a family feud.

The victim's mother Rokeya Begum and some other relatives were also present at the press conference.

'Mastaan culture result of failed banking reforms'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Thanks to political ties of union leaders, Banking Sector Reform has failed to address the issue of the prevalent mastaan culture in various sectors in Bangladesh, particularly in public construction and procurement, said an economist yesterday.

Professor Muzaffer Ahmad, one of Structural Adjustment Preparatory Review Initiative (SAPRI) Bangladesh researchers, while making a presentation on the adjustment and the state of corruption at the Second National Forum said interference of so-called trade unions in the function of public sector banks also manifest the mafia phenomena in banking.

Yesterday was the concluding day of the 3rd syndicate of the Second National Forum held at the CIRDAP auditorium in the city. The meeting was chaired by the former FBCCI (Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry) chief Abdul Awal Mintoo.

Prof Ahmad said the mafia as an organised crime ring provides protection to both bribe-givers and bribe-takers in order to limit competition and even eliminate competition.

Such mafia domination is possible only where the state administration is weak, he said.

Ahmad observed that strength and survival of political parties nowadays heavily depend on their nexus with wealthy Mafia dons.

"Political corruption resulting from the loss of ideological focus is caused by the overpowering need to finance politics. This has given rise to 'businessman politicians' in Bangladesh."

The larger number of corrupt officials, the lower the risk associated with paying bribe. Although this reduces the individual share of the bribe money, the total payment increases with the number of corrupt officials, he said. "The utility and public service sectors in the country are good examples of competitive bribery."

Ahmad mentioned police stations, lower judicial courts, public hospitals, sub-registrars, land record, tehsil offices and scheduled banks are the most corrupt places in the country.

Corruption or rent seeking in essence is an institutional failure caused by market and policy inadequacy, he said.

"Desire to become rich quickly, moral degradation and absence of accountability are the prime reasons for persistent corruption in public offices."

Misuse of power through discretion, misuse of resources due to weak monitoring as well as embezzlement and extortion are prevalent forms of corruption, he said, adding that bribery is highest among personnel of the law enforcement agency and tax, land administration and telecommunication departments.

In his address, Abdul Awal Mintoo predicted that political violence by armed cadres will increase much more in the next general election than the last one.

Mintoo blamed the politicians for dividing the civil society. "Civil society must unite in order to force politicians to behave."

Citing examples, Mintoo said there is no businessman, doctor or lawyer in the country today who is not labeled as either pro-AL or pro-BNP.

To face some major social challenges like corruption, there is no alternative to unity of the civil society, he said.

WB: Low-priority projects

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Stressing wide consultations and dialogue process to involve the people in formulating policy, Prof Sobhan said the country should professionally design its own policy for the next 10 years.

Mohiuddin Khan Alamgir raised questions whether the WB or the IMF had the mandate to point out faults in governance and poverty alleviation programmes and said the WB has shifted from its original principles.

"There are organisations which can do this, but certainly not the World Bank, the IMF," Alamgir said. The government obviously wants to ensure good governance and remove poverty.

The state minister however said that in the absence of any home-grown policy programme, the country had to accept donors' recipe.

Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud said the World Bank's focus has changed from investment to poverty reduction and it is now giving technical assistance for micro credit management. He termed this "Carrying coal to New Castle".

He went on, "We certainly do not need technical assistance for managing micro credit but need technical assistance for diversifying and boosting our export."

Prof Mahmud said diversification of rice production has helped reduce poverty more than Food for Work Programme could do.

The country now has a more representative government compared to those in the 1980s. So there would be more consensus on many issues now, he noted.

On the question of good governance, Prof Mahmud said the people have to achieve it instead of depending on "outside forces".

Commenting on SAPRI, Temple said the common challenge of the government and the WB would be to reduce difference on policy issues.

Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya said despite being a party to the SAPRI process, the World Bank's initiative to present separate papers in every session at this forum created confusion.

JS session: Crucial bills

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Court Judges (Remuneration and Privilege) (Amendment) Bill and Law Commission (Amendment) Bill.

The Parliament Secretariat is expected to receive four other important bills from the ministries of Telecommunications and Energy and Mineral Resources, an official at the law section of the Parliament Secretariat told The Daily Star.

The Seventh Parliament is marked with a record number of by-elections during its four years and nine months' tenure.

The coming session will also see three new faces, elected through by-elections. Two of them Shawkot Momen Shahjahan of Tangail-8 and B M Nazrul Islam of Satkhira-1 took oath yesterday. The other parliament member M A Qaderi of Pabna-5 on March 11.

Although Shahjahan own the November 15, 1999 by-election in

Tangail-8 constituency following the resignation of Bagabir Kader Siddique from parliament, the official result was published on March 13 after a judicial inquiry.

B M Nazrul and M A Qaderi were elected in by-polls, held last month virtually without any contest. The by-polls were held following the death of Syed Kamal Bakht Saki and Rafiqul Islam Bakul.

Photographer

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Debebe tried to attract attention of the special plane's pilot. The control tower also contacted the pilot but he declined to stop the aircraft.

The photographer looked totally upset missing the flight. Earlier, he had miraculously escaped unhurt in a serious road accident minutes before reaching the airport. A police car which was giving him a lift to the airport turned turtle after it was hit by another vehicle from behind. The car was badly smashed and its injured driver was sent to the Combined Military Hospital.

Although Debebe could not manage to board the special aircraft, his passport and luggage were already in it.

Later, the UN Mission and government officials in Dhaka made special arrangements to send him to Delhi by a commercial flight.



BNP leaders made a courtesy call UN Secretary General Kofi Annan at Hotel Sonargaon in the city yesterday.

Annan

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send 2,509 more within this month. This will place the country in number one position in international peace-keeping operations. Poland is now at the top.

Annan and his wife were seen off by Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad, UNDP Resident Representative in Dhaka Jorgen Lissner and officials of the Foreign Ministry.

3,185 expelled on first day

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Board.

Of the expelled, 23 were in Narayanganj, 29 in Munshiganj, 16 in Manikganj, 55 in Tangail, 133 in Mymensingh, 75 in Gazipur, 102 in Kishoreganj, 139 in Netrokona, 13 in Rajbari, 20 in Shariatpur, 39 in Madaripur, 20 in Faridpur and one in Dhaka city.

Our correspondent from Chittagong adds: Massive copying marked the English first paper exam under the Chittagong Board and 368 examinees and seven invigilators were expelled.

A group of reporters and photographers were abused by the Thana Nirbahi Officer (TNO) for taking notes and snaps of copying at Rangunia High School Centre. The newsmen were held on order by the TNO but released after half an hour on intervention of the higher authorities.

Of the expelled, 13 were in Bandarban, 64 in Cox's Bazaar, 35 in Rangamati, 25 in Khagrachari and 200 at other exam centres of the division.

Jessore Board officials said 438 examinees were expelled yesterday from different examination centres under the board. Of the expelled, 62 were in Chuadanga, 48 in Bagerhat, 68 in Jhenaidah, 20 in Satkhira, 18 in Magura, 12 in Meherpur, 53 in Khulna, 111 in Kushtia, 36 in Jessore and 17 in Narail.

Our Barisal correspondent reports: One hundred and twenty two examinees were expelled yesterday from different centres under the newly commissioned board comprising six southern districts of Barisal, Patuakhali, Bhola, Barguna, Jhalokhati and Pirojpur.

Our Sylhet correspondent reports: About 99 examinees were expelled yesterday from different examination centres under the newly commissioned board.

Our Narayanganj correspondent says examination at some centres in the district began five to ten minutes after the schedule as question papers reached late.

The English first paper examination under the new board began about 20 to 25 minutes later at two centres.

The examination began after 25 minutes at Chandranath Girls' High School under Chhatak upazila headquarter of Sunamganj district as the centre secretary was late to bring the question papers from TNO's office, sources said.

The examination was about 20 minutes behind the schedule as Gopalganj Dhaka Dokhin High School centre was short of 37 question papers. Officials of the centre later rushed to the thana headquarters about 4.5 miles away to have adequate question papers for the examinees.

Some 50 were expelled in Sunamganj, 11 in Hobiganj, 29 in Sylhet and nine in Moulvibazar.

Comilla Board officials said 810 examinees were expelled yesterday from different examination centres under the board.

Of the expelled, 335 were in Comilla, 89 in Brahmanbaria, 76 in Chandpur, 130 in Noakhali, 86 in Feni and 94 in Laxmipur.

Officials of the Rajshahi Board said 658 were expelled under the board yesterday. Of the expelled, 178 were in Naogaon, 59 in Joypurhat, 254 in Rangpur, 81 in Nilphamari and 86 in Lalmonirhat.

Kickback scam

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held and that is why I've taken this decision," said Trinamool leader Mamata Banerjee, who also resigned her post as railways minister.

Bangaru Laxman, president of Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party, which dominates the ruling coalition, had resigned on Tuesday after being filmed receiving 100,000 rupees (2,170 dollars) from the undercover journalists.

Jaya Jaitley, who is president of another coalition ally, the Samata Party, announced yesterday that she was resigning having also been filmed accepting cash.

Both Laxman and Jaitley claimed they were victims of a smear campaign.

In his resignation statement, Fernandes insisted that his period in office had improved transparency and helped weed out corruption in the defence ministry, especially in the field of weapons procurement.

"While it is true that there may be black sheep in every organisation... would be wrong and despicable to tarnish everyone with the same brush," he said.

AL, BNP leaders agree

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pollution, the health minister said, "We should not always depend on foreign aid. We have to find out our solution by ourselves."

He said arsenic crisis in other countries like Argentina, Mexico and Thailand is centred in a specific area and the cause behind the arsenic pollution in those countries is industrial wastage.

The minister mentioned that a nine-member task force with experts has been formed to find out the reason behind alarming arsenic contamination in tube-well water in the country.

There are about 1.25 crore tube-wells in the country, of which the water of only 2.5 lakh has been tested so far, he informed.

BNP leader Sadek Hossain Khoka termed the arsenic problem a national disaster and said all will have to join hands in mitigating the problem, forgetting all differences.

Khoka said not only the rural areas, Dhaka city is now also facing the threat of arsenic contamination.

Citing examples of different reasons for pollution, the only BNP lawmaker in the city pointed out that water of the rivers around the capital are now being contaminated by different pollutants.

Another BNP lawmaker Ehasnul Huq Milon of Kachua in Chandpur district said his constituency is the most arsenic-affected area in the country.

Quoting a survey conducted in 1996, he said some 83 per cent tube-well water was found contaminated with arsenic at that time but the percentage already rose to around 98 per cent.

"No significant measure has been taken to face the calamity," Milon said. He also mentioned that only 34,868 people out of 3 lakh inhabitants of the area are getting arsenic-free water.

FEJB President Quamrul Islam Chowdhury chaired the seminar addressed, among others, by Dr Iftekhar Hossain, deputy programme manger (Arsenic) under the Health Ministry, Peter Herson, consultant of DPHE-DANIDA project and Dr Mafuzul Hoque.