

Hail Yunus

FROM PAGE 1 Muhammad Yunus as the world's recognition to his contribution in resolving poverty, our New Delhi correspondent reports.

In a congratulatory letter to Yunus, Singh said, "The Grameen Bank chief is an outstanding South Asian and I as a South Asian rejoice."

Describing Yunus as his friend, Singh told accompanying Indian journalists in Helsinki, where he is attending India-European Union summit, that the microcredit movement Yunus has launched has important lessons for tackling poverty, particularly the problem of rural poverty.

"It's a well-deserved honour," the Indian prime minister said adding it was no surprise that the world at large has recognised Yunus's contribution in resolving the problem of poverty.

Singh, in a message addressed to Yunus, said, "On behalf of the people of India and on my own behalf, I salute this magnificent achievement that has brought honour and pride not only to Bangladesh but to all people of South Asia."

Former US first lady Senator Hillary Clinton in a message congratulated Muhammad Yunus and recalled that he went to Arkansas 20 years ago to cooperate with her and her husband, former president Bill Clinton, in introducing microcredit to the USA, BSS reports.

"Since then I avoided the opportunities of hearing the people who were benefited from the microcredit programmes when ever I visited Bangladesh and other countries," she said.

"It still impresses me when I hear about plans of improving the fates of the low-end women and their families through Grameen programmes," she said adding, "I also nominated Dr Yunus for Nobel Prize."

Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez praised Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus as a helper of the poor and called the Bangladeshi economist and microcredit pioneer a friend, UNB reports.

Chavez paused during a televised speech Friday night to read a news report on Yunus' selection for the prize along with his Grameen Bank.

"Let's give a round of applause to our friend," Chavez said, calling him an "example in the fight against poverty."

Yunus founded the Grameen Bank in the 1970s and pioneered the concept of microcredit - very small loans to would-be entrepreneurs without access to collateral. The practice has spread around the world and helped millions of people overcome poverty. "We're going down that road," said Chavez, who has promised to eventually eliminate poverty in his oil-producing country.

Indian Congress chief Sonia Gandhi in her message addressed to Yunus said, "You and the Grameen Bank have also shown the world the discipline and the integrity with which the poor pay back loans. We take great pride and joy in your winning

the Nobel Peace Prize and wish you and Grameen Bank every success in your future endeavour."

Hailing the award to Yunus, Finance Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram said, "There can be no better guarantee for peace than prosperity and Yunus has brought prosperity to a large number of people."

He said he was pleased that a man from the subcontinent got the award. "He has demonstrated that women are deserving and reliable borrowers," he added.

Women groups in India also welcomed the Nobel Peace Prize for Yunus and Grameen Bank. CPI (M) politbu member and Member of Parliament Brinda Karat said the award was a recognition of Yunus's good credit policy that changed the lives of poor women.

Leading social activist Aruna Roy, who won the Magsaysay award, said Yunus was always concerned with poverty and he dedicated his life for the uplift of poor women.

Ranjana Kumari of the Centre for Policy Research said Yunus has helped women repose faith in themselves. "The Grameen Bank worked for the poorest of the poor women and proved that women can change the economy of society with their own effort. The high repayment rate of the Bank is also important in the growing economy," she added.

Mathew Tirus, Executive Director of the NGO Swadhan, said the Nobel Peace Prize for Yunus and the Grameen Bank would give a leg-up to microcredit sector and the poor need a savings bank model like Grameen Bank and not only credit.

YSP Thorat, former chief general manager of rural credit and planning department of the Reserve Bank of India, recalled that he has worked with Yunus and said, "We will invite the Grameen Bank founder to India and seek his advice on how to upgrade our model to suit our socio-economic condition."

"The one thing I have learnt from him is that it is not necessary to debate over economic principles of poverty. What is important is to do something about it," Thorat, chairman of National Agriculture and Bank for Rural Development, said.

Nachiket Mor, deputy managing director of ICICI Bank, one of biggest Indian private banks, said Yunus has proved that even market-based institutions can have a positive impact on social issues.

Chinese ambassador to Bangladesh Chai Xi congratulated Mohammad Yunus and his Grameen Bank on winning the Nobel Peace Prize, UNB reports.

In a message Chai Xi said, "I have the honour and pleasure, on behalf of the Chinese government and in my own name, to extend my warmest congratulations to you [Yunus] and the Grameen Bank for your remarkable contributions to the global sustainable peace and development through poverty alleviation initiatives based on microcredit schemes."

"The spring up and growth of the Grameen Bank model vividly not only

illustrates your personal outstanding genius and willpower, but also maps out how important the collective consensus, concern and confidence play in the long campaign for liberating global poor below from repressive economic and social swamp," he added.

He expressed his firm belief that under the dynamic leadership of Yunus the Grameen Bank will make even greater contributions to mankind and the poverty reduction in particular in the days to come.

Bangladesh expatriates living in different countries including UK, USA and the Middle East celebrated the winning of Nobel Peace Prize by Muhammad Yunus.

The Bangladeshis exchanged greetings, embraced with each other and distributed sweets as soon as they heard the exciting news through the media.

Many sent SMS and emails to their friends and relations in Bangladesh.

They believe winning the Nobel Prize would enhance the image and honour of Bangladesh and Bangladeshis living abroad.

PM

FROM PAGE 1 Airport for Jeddah at 7:35pm. The visit is supposed to be her last official foreign visit as the tenure of this government expires on October 27.

Family members of the PM, including her son Arafat Rahman and his wife, ruling BNP lawmaker Mosaddek Ali Falu, former state minister Mir Nasiruddin and Principal Secretary to the PM Dr Kamal Siddiqui and two senior officials of the foreign ministry accompanied her.

The PM's eldest son Tarique Rahman and his wife are learnt to have left for Saudi Arabia on Friday.

"It is an official visit to Saudi Arabia. The prime minister will hold talks with the Saudi leadership, and they will discuss matters concerning bilateral relations," said Enayet Mawla, a director at the foreign ministry.

Officials at the foreign ministry said Khaleda would call on King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud today in Makkah and she would have a meeting with Crown Prince Sultan Bin Abdul Aziz on October 17 in this holy city.

The official news agency BSS reports that on the sidelines of the official talks, heads of the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) will call on the prime minister.

On conclusion of her official engagements, Khaleda will perform Umrah and go to Medina to perform Ziarat at the Rauza Mubarak of Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM).

The Bangladesh community in Jeddah will host an Iftar reception in honour of the PM tomorrow.

At the airport, Khaleda was seen off by Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman, LGRD Minister Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, Foreign Minister Morshed Khan, Foreign Affairs Adviser Reaz Rahman, State Minister for Home Lutfuzzaman Babar, chiefs of the three services and senior civil and military officials.

Unsolicited deals

FROM PAGE 1 level, which was not done in this deal.

The Bureau of Mineral Development (BMD) awarded the contract. Placed under the energy ministry, the bureau is run by a single official.

Previously, the then BNP government in 1994 leased out Phulbari coal zone to mining giant BHP, which later landed with Asia Energy.

Though that process involved bidding and negotiations, it recently drew public criticism as being anti-people. The BNP government had also struck a Suppliers Credit deal with China for Barapukuria, in which Hosaf took the lead as the local agent. This deal has enormously drained out national resources through corruption and failed to deliver the mine or the power project as per the contract.

The Hosaf deal was made when energy prices globally rose and price of coal exceeded \$50 per tonne from \$25 of the nineties. "Khalashpir coal belongs to the nation and it is worth billions of dollars. The nation deserves a fair deal," noted a source.

Earlier this year, Hosaf group along with Xinwen Mining Group of China concluded a geological survey in Khalashpir zone. The survey began in January 2005.

Drilling just three test holes in the region and conducting seismic survey, they came to the conclusion that the zone has a recoverable reserve of 143 million tonnes of high quality bituminous coal in eight underground layers in 2.5 sq km area of Pirganj upazila of Khalashpir.

In contrast, Asia Energy had drilled 108 holes before coming to the conclusion that Phulbari zone has 572 million tonnes of recoverable coal.

Hosaf hopes to start extracting coal from Khalashpir in 2008.

Though Hosaf's involvement in Barapukuria mine could not help completion of that mine in 10 years, the company in less than two years not only completed a reserve study but also submitted a feasibility report to the government on August 1.

Hosaf Chief Moazzem Hossain

told the press that the feasibility study outlined a \$300 million joint investment with China for developing the coal mine and setting up a 220 MW power plant.

This shows a sharp contrast with the investments made in Barapukuria coal mine and power projects, in which Hosaf is involved from the beginning.

Barapukuria coal mine alone is charging the government \$250 million and the 250 MW power project at the mine site is charging another \$260 million. The total cost here is \$510 million.

Hosaf says it had brought the Chinese Supplier's Credit deal with Bangladesh. But according to the World Bank and economists, about 40 percent of any Supplier's Credit goes to pockets of unscrupulous people involved in such projects.

Barapukuria mine constructions began in 1995 and it was handed over to Barapukuria Coal Mine Company Ltd (BCMCL) of Petrobangla last year in unfinished condition. The mine's production capacity has halved because of flawed project design while the power plant keeps on tripping due to technical glitches. In addition, the power plant is consuming an unbelievable 1,100 tonnes of underground water for power production causing a massive environmental hazard.

Experts criticised the way Hosaf was chosen and given the deal.

"This is not how the government should lease out national resources worth billions of dollars to individuals or a private company. The Bureau of Mineral Development is not at all equipped to sign such a deal," says a geologist experienced in coal mining and exploration.

"The BMD should be merged with the GSB which has about 600 people, including top level experts. Years ago, the government was given specific proposal for such merger. But the government ignored it because it is easy to control or influence one or two officials than influencing a group of experts to help it take a bad decision," he noted.

Skop enforces

FROM PAGE 16 blockade the highways, railways and waterways for four hours today from 8:00am to 12:00 noon.

Meanwhile, Garments Sramik O Shipra Rokhoya Jatiya Mancha at a press conference yesterday expressed their solidarity with today's strike and withdrew the 24-hour strike called for tomorrow.

Skop's demands also include stop denationalisation, eradication of injustice in different pay commissions and revision of the labour law as per the ILO convention.

In a press conference yesterday at its office in the capital, Skop leaders reiterated their commitment to continue their programmes for the realisation of the rights of workers and employees.

Skop leaders urged the government to review recently proposed minimum wage for the RMG workers.

Sramik League secretary Roy Romesh Chandra said according to the proposed pay scale, a garment worker would get only Tk 37 a day with which one cannot afford to buy one kg of rice and a kg of potato from the market.

"Garment workers and leaders are not involved in any destructive and counter productive activities", he said ruling out the allegation of ransacking garment factories that surfaced once again after the October 10 strike.

Persons involved in destructive activities must either be agents of the government or of the garment owners, he added.

The RMG industry has reached a viable state with backbreaking labour by the workers and these workers cannot do anything that would ruin the industry, Romesh explained.

ICC Trophy

FROM PAGE 16 tournament proper.

The northern Indian city is already abuzz with the presence of their vaunted home team along next-door neighbours Pakistan and the Ashes winning England side, who will play their Group A matches here.

The new-look Sawai Mansingh Stadium will host two more group encounters besides the second semifinal on November 2.

The stadium and its adjacent area have been dressed up beautifully as the tournament coincides with Diwali, India's biggest festival. In the evenings the Pink city turns into a sea of lights as every building and even trees in the area have been illuminated.

Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, calls itself the "The Greatest Show on Earth" and big banners pencilling that statement along with posters of Sachin Tendulkar and other stars, welcomes the cricket lovers in the stadium area.

Diwali adds more spice to the tournament this year and the cricket-crazy Indians believes the festival of lights will reach a crescendo if their home side can get off to a winning start here today.

Nation parties on Nobel win

FROM PAGE 1 Shaheed Minar in the capital and the National Memorial in Savar.

Prof Yunus dedicated the glory of winning the Nobel Peace Prize to the nation through paying tribute at the Shaheed Minar.

"We hope the politics will become clean by ending all confrontations," Prof Yunus told the gathering and the press. "I wish today's victory and glory washed away all the darkness and conflicts in the society like a cyclone."

He spoke of his dream to build Bangladesh a prosperous and poverty-free nation, a dream for which many valiant sons of the soil sacrificed their lives in the Liberation War.

In reply to a question, the Nobel laureate said he does not hope that he will have to play the role of a mediator to solve the present political crisis. He rather gave importance to solving the problems politically.

"The dialogue is on the right track and we assume that it will end amicably," he said.

Prof Yunus, however, declined to make any comment when asked if there is any chance for his becoming the chief adviser to the next caretaker government.

Earlier in the morning, Prof Yunus told journalists at the Central Shaheed Minar, "I hope the politicians will come to a consensus forgetting all disputes."

"We want to prolong today's peaceful and happy environment until the election period," said the microcredit guru.

He hoped that the politicians will also stand united--just as the entire nation got united and celebrated his Nobel Peace Prize win--for the welfare of the nation by forgetting small differences.

"Let the people elect their chosen candidates and establish a new government," he said.

Dr Yunus visited the National Memorial around 12:30pm to pay tribute to the martyrs of the country's Liberation War. "I have come

here to tell the valiant sons of this soil the story of today's glory," said an emotion-choked Yunus.

Prof Yunus will be visiting Chittagong today to celebrate the award with the city people and with the first beneficiaries of Grameen Bank's microcredit programme at Jobra village under Hathazari upazila, reports our staff correspondent in Chittagong.

He will address members of the civil society, academicians, professionals, journalists, his old friends, colleagues and well-wishers at the Engineers Institute auditorium at 10:00am.

The Nobel laureate would then go to Jobra village, about 20 kilometres off the city, from where his epoch-making idea of "microcredit" kicked off some three decades ago.

Our JU correspondent reports: Prof Yunus visited the National Memorial in Savar yesterday afternoon and said, "Political disputes must be settled for alleviation of poverty in the country. Political leaders should give up revengeful politics and spiteful activities to offer a better political environment to the nation."

"We pledge to the sons of the soil who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of the country. Today is a great day of joy and festivity. We succeeded to win the Nobel Peace Prize for the country. We promise not to let the supreme sacrifices turn futile and to bring home more news of joy that would make us proud," wrote Prof Yunus in the visitors' book.

Urging the leaders of the country to get every political crisis or dispute settled or resolved for the sake of the country, Prof Yunus said, "Leaders might have disputes over different issues in politics, but a consensus among the leaders must be achieved to bring about a solution."

"We want a fair election and we do not want anymore clashes centring the election," he added.

"As a big recognition has been achieved, Grameen Bank will put in more efforts from now on to eradicate poverty from the country. We have to introduce new programmes to work for the peace," said Yunus replying to a question regarding next activities of Grameen Bank after winning the prize.

People from all walks of life and Grameen Bank employees from Manikganj and Dhamrai thronged the area since the morning, dancing and singing in celebration.

Four kids named Abir Hossain, Anushree Sarker, Pijush Midha Shubho and Hasibur Rahman welcomed Prof Yunus after he reached the National Memorial at 12:15pm to place wreath.

He was accompanied by his wife Prof Afrozi Yunus, Managing Director of Grameen Shakti Dweep Chandra Barua, GM of Grameen Bank Nurjahan Begum, DGM of Grameen Bank Jamal Uddin Biswas, MD of Grameen Udyog SM Shamim Anwar, and MD of Grameen Kalyan Muhammad Jahangir.

PM's felicitation

FROM PAGE 1 embraced the prime minister's political secretary and said, "This is not only my achievement, but also of the country, the government and every citizen of Bangladesh."

Yunus thanked the Prime Minister for greeting him.

Secretary to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) Khandker Shahidul Islam, Prime Minister's Private Secretary Monirul Islam and her Assistant Press Secretary Mushfiqul Fazal Ansari accompanied the political secretary.

Passport seekers

FROM PAGE 1 they were compelled to bribe the police.

On the other hand, 34.6 and 51.7 per cent applicants who secured their passports through middlemen and travel agencies, did not have to go through police enquiry, while the percentage was only 5.6 in case of the individuals who directly applied, the report said.

The TIB report said during the research period 61.20 per cent passports were not issued in time and reasons behind it were mentioned as delay in receiving police report, passport writing and negative police report.

Eighty-five per cent applicants secured passports in time when they applied through travel agencies and 70 per cent got it in time when they did it through middlemen while the percentage was only 45 when the individuals directly applied, the report revealed.

The middlemen use false addresses where they have their familiar police stations so that they can get the job done speedily, the TIB report said, adding that the middlemen also have an association that takes tolls from the general middlemen.

The research identified lack of manpower and budget, pressure on the employees who write the passports and insufficient fee for the police personnel who go far distances for enquiry as limitations of the passport department.

Prof CR Abrar, coordinator of Refugee and Migratory Movement Research Movement of Dhaka University, said there should be a system where the passport offices will be obliged to show cause if the passport is not issued in time.

Instead of the police's going for enquiry, there should be provision for applicants' attaching documents while submitting the application forms and correspondence between the passport office and the applicants should be through Internet to curb delay and corruption, former additional inspector general of police Masudul Haque said.

In reaction to the TIB report, Association of Travel Agencies Bangladesh President Mohaimen Saleh said the passport service is in the grip of the middlemen, which cannot be easily undone.

"That is why the travel agencies should be given licence so that they can provide services in this regard."

Other speakers suggested entrusting the local police stations to verify the applicants' addresses and decentralise the passport authorities to curb corruption and speed up the procedure.

TIB member Syed Didarul Alam, Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies Secretary General Ali Haider Chowdhury, member Abdul Alim, migration experts Mahbubur Rahman, Tanvir Siddiqui, Sumaiya Islam, and Anisur Rahman Khan also spoke at the roundtable.

TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman and former adviser to caretaker government Hafizuddin Khan were present.

China, Russia

FROM PAGE 16 by land, air and sea. Both China and Russia share borders with North Korea and are uncomfortable with the possibility of the US interdicting ships near their coasts. Bolton said he expected most actions would be performed at ports.

The accord came as US officials said Friday that an air sampling after North Korea's claimed nuclear test detected radioactive debris consistent with an atomic explosion. However, the Bush administration and congressional officials said no final determination had been made about the nature of Monday's mystery-shrouded blast.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitive nature of the information.

Results from another test disclosed Friday an initial air sampling on Tuesday showed no evidence of radioactive particles that would be expected from a successful nuclear detonation, a US government intelligence official said.

Meanwhile, North Korean ships loaded their final cargo of second hand bicycles and household appliances in the Japanese port city of Sakaiminato after Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's Cabinet agreed to ban trade with the communist state. The unilateral Japanese sanctions also include a six-month ban on travel to Japan by all North Korean government officials.

The US and other nations trying to persuade the North to give up its atomic programme continued a flurry of high-level diplomatic visits. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice planned a trip next week to Asia; Russia sent an envoy to Pyongyang; and the presidents of China and South Korea the North's main sources of trade and aid met in Beijing to discuss the proposed resolution.

The US-sponsored draft would declare the claimed test had increased tension in northeast Asia, creating "a clear threat to international peace and security." It would declare the act in "flagrant disregard" of the council's appeal not to detonate a nuclear device, demand that North Korea not conduct any further test or launch any more ballistic missiles, and authorise a range of economic and diplomatic sanctions.

The draft would freeze the financial assets of and impose a travel ban on individuals and entities with any connection to North Korea's weapons or missile programmes. It would also ban countries from selling luxury goods to North Korea.

Asked why, Bolton said, "I think the North Korean population has been losing average height and weight over the years and maybe this will be a little diet for Kim Jong Il," North Korea's leader.

Chinese Ambassador Wang Guangya, asked earlier whether Beijing was prepared to go along with the ban, said: "I don't know what luxury goods means, because luxury goods can mean many things for different people ... if they don't have it."

The latest draft resolution still invokes Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which the US views as a necessary because it makes economic and diplomatic sanctions mandatory.

China and Russia normally object to the Chapter 7 provision because it carries the possibility of military enforcement. The Bush administration used the same provision to justify its invasion of Iraq, and Moscow and Beijing worry the US might do the same eventually with North Korea even though President Bush has said the US has no plans to attack.

But in a compromise also used in July to unanimously vote on a resolution condemning North Korean missile launches, the text added mention of Article 41 of the chapter, which permits only "means not involving the use of military force."

The resolution would rely on all countries to implement the sanctions, but it would create a committee comprising all 15 Security Council nations to monitor enforcement and report any violations to the council.

Rice's trip to China, South Korea and Japan is the next step in the US diplomatic offensive at the United Nations and with Pyongyang's neighbours. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said "she's going to be talking about the passage of that resolution certainly, but really what comes after."

The trip is meant to present a unified front to North Korea, which will be looking for any cracks in the diplomatic coalition behind the UN statement.

A Russian nuclear envoy who visited North Korea said Saturday he pressed the North to return to six-nation nuclear disarmament talks. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Alexeyev said he had a "very useful" meeting Friday with Kim Gye Gwan, the North's nuclear negotiator, but didn't say how Kim responded. Alexeyev spoke on his arrival in Beijing from Pyongyang, North Korea's capital.

Pyeongyang has boycotted the six-nation talks for the past 13 months to protest financial measures imposed by Washington for alleged counterfeiting and money-laundering.

Earlier a Russian news agency quoted Alexeyev as saying North Korea favours the implementation of a year-old agreement to abandon its nuclear programmes in exchange for aid and security guarantees.

The report apparently referred to an agreement reached in September 2005 at the talks involving the two Koreas, the US, China, Russia and Japan. If the Russian report is confirmed, it could signify a major breakthrough in efforts to curb North Korea's nuclear ambitions.