

Truck bomber kills 9 Iraqi policemen

AFP, AP, Tikrit

A suicide bomber killed nine Iraqi policemen and wounded dozens more yesterday as he exploded his truck outside a police post near the northern hometown of executed dictator Saddam Hussein.

The savage attack – part of the sustained insurgent assaults on security forces in a bid to thwart US and Iraqi efforts to stabilise the war-torn country – was the second of its kind in as many days.

The bomber detonated the vehicle against a police department building in an area called Albu Ajli, east of Tikrit, on the main road between the city and the oil hub of Kirkuk, police officials said.

At least 40 people, many of them policemen, were also wounded in the attack that took place at 10:15 am (0615 GMT), they said.

"Nine policemen have died in the blast and 40 more are wounded, mostly policemen," Major Abdul Karim Mohammed, a security official at Tikrit general hospital, told AFP.

Following the blast, Tikrit police announced on loudspeakers an indefinite curfew in the city, an AFP reporter said.

The attack came a day after a suicide bomber exploded his truck at an Iraqi army base near the town of Iskandiriyah, southwest of Baghdad, killing 14 soldiers and wounding 30.

Car bombs were also reported in Baghdad and the restive province of Diyala on Sunday.

Iraqi security officials said two people were killed and seven wounded as a car bomb exploded near a petrol station in Baghdad's Al-Bayaa district and one person died when another car bomb targeted a gas station in the Saiidiyah area of the capital. Five people were also wounded in the Saiidiyah attack.

In the town of Khan Beni Saad in Diyala, northeast of Baghdad, a car bomb killed a policeman and wounded three people, police Lieutenant Ahmed Ali said from Baquba.

He said the bomb targeted a police checkpoint.

Also on Sunday, a Kurdish officer serving in the Iraqi army was killed and two of his colleagues were wounded when their vehicle struck a roadside bomb near Sulaiman Bek, said Abbas Mohammed Amin, police chief of the nearby town of Tuz Khurmatu.

The three officers were deployed in Baghdad as part of the ongoing "surge" in the Iraqi capital and were

on their way back home when the bomb hit their vehicle, he said.

US and Iraqi forces are currently carrying out a massive security operation in Baghdad to curb sectarian violence unleashed since early last year.

The surge, announced by US President George W. Bush, is expected to see 160,000 US troops deployed in Iraq, mostly in Baghdad, by the end of this month.

A Washington Post report on Sunday said the United States is considering a long-term military presence in Iraq that will not have the scope of the current occupation but still be capable of mounting independent operations.

Citing US military officers and other unnamed officials, it said the plan is based on assessments that a sharp drawdown of troops is likely to begin by the middle of next year, with roughly two-thirds of the current force of 150,000 moving out by late 2008 or early 2009.

An al-Qaeda linked Iraqi militant group on Sunday claimed responsibility for the killing of a female journalist in the northern city of Mosul, in an Internet statement.

Militants from Ansar al-Sunnah shot dead Sahar al-Haydari, 45, who worked for the Voices of Iraq news agency, "for distorting the image of the Mujahadeen (holy warriors)", the group said.

Police have said Haydari was killed on Thursday in the Al-Habbad district of the city as she was on her way to work.

According to a June 6 toll posted by Reporters without Borders on their website, 182 journalists and media workers, mostly Iraqis, had been killed in Iraq since the US-led invasion of March 2003.

Skyscraper

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"There is facility for parking 72 cars at this building. But I have bought a piece of 10-katha land on road No 35 where I will build another high-rise building with car parking facilities on seven floors – two base-ments and five others. So it would be a supplementary car parking space for this building also," he added.

Tarique, uncle Shamim

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days to submit their statements.

The eleven others who also submitted their wealth statement are BNP's MAH Selim alias Silver Selim, former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Habibur Rahman Mollah, former BNP minister Shahjahan Siraj, former member of the Public Service Commission Prof Mahfuzur Rahman, ex-AL minister Syed Abul Hossain, ex-chief engineer of the Public Works Department AFM Monjurul Islam, film actor Monwar Hossain Dipol, Editor and Publisher of the Bangla daily Janakantha Atiqullah Khan Masud, ex-additional inspector general of police Shahidullah Khan, AL's Sheikh Helal who is also AL chief Sheikh Hasina's cousin, and a pro-BNP doctors' association leader AZM Zahid Hossain.

The eight who submitted prayers seeking an extension of the deadline are ex-BNP minister Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, ex-minister from Jatya Party Anwar Hossain Manju, ex-BNP minister Ziaul Haq Zia, ex-AL lawmaker Kamal Ahmed Majumder, ex-AL minister Obaidul Quader, former chief restorator Munshi Anwarul Islam, Obaidul Karim of Orion Group, and AK Azad of Hamim Group.

ACC sources said the commission will decide soon whether it will consider the prayers for an extension of the deadline.

"According to the ACC rules a person may seek an extension of seven days to submit his or her wealth statement, but it is up to the commission to allow it," said an ACC source.

The ACC on May 29 issued notices to the 21 corruption suspects to come up with wealth statements within seven days of receipt of that notice.

When the ACC published its first list of 50 corruption suspects in February, it made it mandatory for the suspects not in jail to submit their wealth statements in person.

The second time, however, the obligation was withdrawn, allowing the corruption suspects out of jail to submit their statements through representatives, and allowing the already detained suspects to send their statements through their legal authorities.

The ACC received the statements of Tarique, Shamim, Habibur, Selim, Shahjahan and Mahfuz yesterday. Their representatives submitted the

Passport

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passport-processing agent.

The ministry decided to open offices in 17 district headquarters–Moulvibazar, Bogra, Pabna, Tangail, Kushtia, Pataukhali, Narayanganj, Munshiganj, Dinajpur, Cox's Bazar, Chandpur, Gazipur, Manikganj, Narsingdi, Brahmanbaria and Dhaka.

Until then, passports would be issued through the deputy commissioner's office in those districts.

Currently, the country has 15 regional passport offices.

To avoid ambiguity and complication, the passport forms will be revised and simplified.

The home ministry sources said the meeting also discussed problems regarding issuance of police verification reports and passports to the Bangladesh citizens having no permanent address.

Prof Yunus

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destruction as part of 'peace preparations' in the 21st century.

"This century is about finding new and creative ways to tackle problems of the world, and leaving behind the old thinking of the 20th century."

The founder of Grameen Bank called for creation of innovative institutional formations with involvement of governments, social businesses, private sector and the civil society.

Chancellor Merkel highlighted Germany's commitment to fighting poverty, and expressed interest about micro-credit and other innovations being spearheaded by Professor Yunus in Bangladesh.

Chancellor Merkel, Professor Yunus and Bishop Dandala's statements were followed by a question-answer session.

Before the on-stage discussion, Professor Yunus and Chancellor Merkel met separately to discuss G8 issues.

Former German President Richard von Weiszacker, who was present at the event, greeted Professor Yunus and recalled his visit to Bangladesh and Grameen Bank during his presidency.

EC test case

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project, 30 registration centres have been set up in nine wards across Sirpur municipality and registration forms distributed among the households. Some 145 people have been assigned to gather information about the prospective voters. They will do the job from 8:00am to 7:00pm everyday.

Local political leaders appreciated the EC move. "It's a historic step. The voter list should be prepared with photographs," former Awami League (AL) lawmaker Advocate Rahmat Ali told journalists.

Former president of Sirpur upazila BNP Abdul Motaleb said, "We all should take part in the project to complete it successfully."

Shamima Akhter, who went to a registration centre to be on the roll, told reporters, "No one will be able to cast my vote as the list now has my photograph on it."

Echoing the view, ZI Subed said, "Hopefully, fake voting will come down drastically once there is a voter list having photographs."

Mayor Minu

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the public prosecutor (PP), Ekramul Haq, on his bail prayer.

Nearly 50 lawyers led by Mojibur Rahman Chowdhury and Ankur Sen pleaded for the mayor.

They told the court that there were no specific charges against the accused in the first information report.

However, the PP defended that police primarily found the extortion allegations to be true and pressed charges against 11 persons including Minu.

The PP also said Lutfar Rahman, budget-cum-accounts officer of Rajshahi City Corporation who was arrested by the joint forces a few months ago, revealed important information regarding Minu's involvement in corruption.

MINU GOES INTO HIDING
Minu went into hiding just after an hour of his bail on information that the Police Headquarters has directed to arrest him again.

Sources said the mayor went to his residence after he was freed from jail at around 5:45pm. He later visited Shah Mahkhum Shrine to say his prayers, sources added.

"Police Headquarters again directed the police to arrest him after his bail and somehow he (Minu) got the information," said a police source adding the police were following him since his bail and saw him changing cars several times within a short time.

Police started raids at 7:00pm at his two houses and inquired about him to his relatives. But nobody could give any information about his whereabouts.

Police were raiding Minu's houses till filing of this report at 9:00pm.

Mainul

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at his information ministry office yesterday, explaining position of the caretaker government on reform, election and a durable democracy.

He said the leaders who are talking about reforms would have to be more courageous and honest as democracy would not be strengthened without courageous and honest leadership.

"Leaders are created in changed situation," the adviser remarked.

Referring to the EU Troika's plea for a roadmap for holding the stalled parliamentary elections, Mainul said, "The EU delegation wants roadmap for the election, but we don't want roadmap for the election only, we want roadmap for the democracy as well."

The adviser said the government already has declared the roadmap for the election as the government promised to hold the polls within 2008.

"Now the Election Commission can declare the election schedule," he said, adding: "We are not interested to hold an election for election's sake, we want to hold it for restoring democracy."

He said those who are involved in gross corruption and under whose leadership democracy was destroyed couldn't lead the nation. "We don't want to see any black money holders and corrupt in the country's political arena."

Without mentioning any timeframe for lifting the ban on indoor politics, Mainul said the government certainly would withdraw the restriction.

Driving downpour

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offices in the coastal belt, an area which usually bears the brunt of cyclones.

The flooding revealed the inadequacies of Dhaka's drainage system. Water and Sewerage Authority (Wasa) sources said the battered system can only cope with 10 millimetres (mm) of rainfall per hour and rainfall in excess of this means waterlogging is inevitable.

Different government agencies have spent around Tk 35 crore in the last five years to tackle the problem of waterlogging but have made only limited progress.

"Wasa undertook projects to improve the capacity of the drainage system but it could not increase the capacity due to faulty designs. So the drainage capacity remains the same," said Kazi Mohammed Shish, former chief engineer of Wasa.

"The storm sewerage was built only to drain out rainwater but now those are being used to drain out all sorts of liquid and solid waste," said Shish.

The storm water drainage system covers 150 square kilometres (sq km) of area, but to be effective it needs to cover at least 260 sq km, Wasa sources added.

Among the areas of the city worst affected were Mirpur, Bashabo, Goran, Azimpur, Dhaka University, Dhamondi, Minto Road, Press Club and High Court area, Maghbazar, Shantinagar, Mowchak and the old parts of the city.

"I saw furniture shops on Rokeya Sharanji getting flooded and the contents soaked," said Shahnaz Parvin, who works for a private firm.

Nearly 10 lakh people inside Dhaka-Narayanganj-Demra (DND) embankment find themselves marooned by waterlogging every year during the monsoon.

This year, residents of the areas near the DND embankment have already become marooned even though the monsoon has yet to begin in full.

In September 2004 the capital remained under water for a week in the wake of a torrent of 346 mm rainfall breaking a 50-year record.

Successive governments formed several committees to find out the reasons and remedies for repeated inundations. As part of the initiatives the local government ministry also undertook initiatives through Wasa and DCC to recover canals and other wetlands from the hands of encroachers, but the initiatives did not bring any fruitful result.

OTHER DISTRICTS
BSS reported that heavy rainfalls were recorded at most places of the northern districts all through the day yesterday causing waterlogging in

both rural and urban areas.

Normal life remained paralysed at most places of Rangpur, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Kurigram, Gaibandha, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Joypurhat, Naogaon, Bogra and the adjoining districts due to torrential showers between the afternoons of Saturday and yesterday.

All major rivers and their tributaries were getting heavy water flows caused by an onrush of water from the hills. Water Development Board (WDB) sources said water level in the Brahmaputra river rose by 25 centimetres (cm), Teesta rose by 20 cm, and Dharla 45 cm during the 24 hours preceding 6:00am yesterday.

Met office sources said heavy rainfalls within a short period of time are becoming a common phenomenon day by day due to a global climate change.

Karzai

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Police repelled the attack and sent reinforcements to the area, forcing the militants to withdraw, Naizyar said.

There have been a number of attacks in the relatively peaceful north, but the southern and eastern provinces are the hardest hit by the insurgency.

In southern Zabul province, Nato and Afghan troops clashed with militants and called in airstrikes, leaving 27 suspected Taliban insurgents dead in the district of Shinkay, said Defence Ministry spokesman Gen. Mohammad Zahir Azimi.

The operation followed intelligence reports of militant activity in the area, Azimi said. There were no reports of civilian casualties, he said.

Neither claim could be independently verified because the incidents occurred in remote areas.

After a winter lull, there has been a sharp spike in clashes and other violence this spring in Afghanistan. Some 2,200 people, many of them insurgents, have died in insurgency-related violence this year, according to an Associated Press count based on numbers reported by the US, Nato, UN and Afghan officials.

Each farmer

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petroleum products from time to time and advise the government on making appropriate adjustments," he added in the budget speech.

To compensate farmers for possible blows resulting from the automatic price formula, the government has allocated Tk 750 crore in diesel subsidies and Tk 1,500 crore in fertiliser subsidies in the proposed budget for financial year 2007-2008.

The block supervisors, together with the local union parishad members, will draw up a list of the farmers to receive the diesel subsidy. However, this list must be approved by the upazila agriculture committee, headed by upazila executive officer.

Farmers will be given a minimum of Tk 100 in diesel subsidy and according to the size of their irrigated land.

The agriculture ministry is creating the new fertiliser distribution policy with a view to curb mismanagement in distribution and fertiliser smuggling, sources said. According to the draft guideline, fertiliser will also be disbursed through the block supervisors by card-rationing system.

A dealer would also be appointed for each union to give out the fertiliser, sources said.

Chandpur power project

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incompetence, and who openly campaigned for Harbin.

"For example, the project director who wrote a letter to Harbin seeking Technical Proposal at the second stage 11 days after expiry of tender submission date continued to serve in the same position, and brief the committee. So, he justified the decision in favour of Harbin to the committee by claiming a cost saving of Tk 86 crore," said an official.

The Daily Star in a series of articles has exposed the trickery of Harbin in showing cost savings in connivance with the PDB by omitting spare parts and inflating civil construction costs.

But since the early May "clearance" of the project, new developments only reinforce the allegation of foul play in tenders won by Harbin. The alliance government had awarded contracts for four power projects in five years –three to Harbin and one to scamster Obaidul Karim's BON Consortium.

Harbin's local agent Nirman International's Chairman Khadja Islam on May 9 filed an extortion case with Gulshan Police Station against Giasuddin Al Mamun,

IGP talks

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"We want to get rid of the 100-year-old colonial image, change the existing concept of policing and it is not possible without close cooperation of people," he said, adding, "We cannot bring any revolutionary change, we can keep the process of turning police into a symbol of reliability and trust going on."

At Rajshahi Police Lines, the IGP asked policemen to change their behaviour and be friendly towards people. "We will show zero tolerance for misbehaviour and corruption," he warned.

He also asked them not to harass anyone intentionally, and care for all citizens as they care for their own family members.

"Those days are gone... there is none to control police from behind. This is high time to dispose of the bad image, we have no other alternative," he said.

Noor Mohammad asked them to serve in an efficient, professional and honest manner, so that the negative perception of police is changed.

He informed policemen about the caretaker government's consideration for a package proposal to upgrade their salaries and develop logistic support. The package proposal include 25 percent incentives on salaries, 60 to 80 percent rationing facility and the use of 70 percent revenue income of traffic management for police.

In the morning, the IGP inaugurated In-service Police Training Centre and Divisional CID's Forensic Laboratory inside the police lines and addressed two meetings of Rajshahi range police and Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP).

Noor Mohammad also met the superintendents of police of 16 districts of Rajshahi division at the same venue earlier.

Rajshahi Deputy Inspector General (DIG) AKM Shahidul Hoq, Rapid Action Battalion Director Lt Col Shamsuzzaman Khan, RMP Commissioner Abul Kashem, Additional DIG of CID Binoy Krishna Bala were present in the programmes.

Zahirul Haq

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president of Dhaka Union of Journalists (DUJ), worked for different newspapers. He was the chief reporter of the now-defunct national daily Dainik Bangla.

Family sources said Zahirul suffered a massive heart attack at about 12:30pm. He was rushed to Ibn Sina Hospital at Dhanmondi where the doctors declared him dead.

His namaj-e-janaza was held after Asr prayers at Mosque-e-Noor at Malibagh and after Magrib prayers at the National Press Club before burial at Shjahanpur graveyard.

Zahirul Haq left behind one daughter, one son, and a host of friends and admirers to mourn his death.

Coal policy

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consumers through national grid because it is impossible for the government to provide sufficient power to all.

Energy Secretary AMM Nasir Uddin said time has come to take decision on coal extraction methodology.

"Many countries have stopped use of underground mining since it often causes accidents killing thousands of people each year," the energy secretary said adding last year around 22,000 workers were killed in an accident in China due to underground mining.

M Tamim, chairman of petroleum and mineral resources department at Buet, said underground mining may cause environment and water pollution.

"But you have to make a balance between the development and environment. You cannot stop development work in the name of environment pollution," he said.

Yunus Akan, chief geologist of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission, said none raised question about the eviction of local people when the urban development projects at Uttara and Purbachal in the capital were taken up.

"But questions were raised when open pit mining was proposed for coal extraction from Phulbari and Barapukuria coalmines," Akan said while presenting the keynote paper.

Ijaz Hossain, professor of chemical engineering at Buet, said the country has enough gas reserves but there is no exploration or development plan to extract that wealth.

Summit Group Chairman Mohammad Aziz Khan said the local investors should be given the chance to set up medium-scale power plants alongside the small power plants.

Associated Press Bureau Chief Farid Hossain moderated the roundtable.

Wild elephants

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around 11:00pm and started ransacking the houses to eat stored paddy, police and locals said.

Alpana's one and a half year-old daughter was also injured.

Later the villagers chased the elephants away.

Call for global

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branches and sending marketing officials abroad for exploring new labour markets and increasing the flow of remittance.

The speakers said over five million Bangladeshis live abroad and they send around \$6 billion remittances every year, which is the major source of the government's foreign currency earnings. But the expatriate workers often face a lot of harassment and the government policies are seldom directed to their needs.

There is no budget allocation for the welfare of the expatriate workers, they pointed out. They demanded punishment to the recruiting agencies that are involved in exploitation of the migrant workers.

Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury also called for concerted efforts to ensure that the migrant workers receive health and life insurances from their employers.

"Temporary labour migration will become safe and we will be able to maximise its developmental impact if we can ensure a minimum living wage for our workers," he said.

He also highlighted some of the crucial problems the sector faces including high migration cost, pervasive information gaps and misplaced expectations. The market imperfections are often evident in biased and unfair labour contracts, he noted.

Recruiting agents often reap abnormal profits, largely at the expense of the migrant workers' interests. Language barriers and a lack of understanding of the host country's legal system can make it difficult for migrant workers to seek legal remedies against unfair labour practices."

The unhealthy competition among recruiting agencies from different developing countries often exacerbates the situation, the adviser said, emphasising massive dissemination campaigns to make prospective migrant workers fully aware of the costs and benefits of overseas employment and their rights and obligations.

On the issue of ratification of the 1990 UN Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Their Families, he said the government will definitely examine the issue with an open mind.

The adviser said during the first trimester of this calendar year, 1,91,806 workers went abroad, marking a 99 per cent increase compared to the corresponding period last year. The remittance from the migrant workers will reach US\$ 6 billion this year, he noted.

Referring to signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with UAE and South Korea, he said these arrangements would ensure safe migration and protect certain basic rights and interests.

Speaking as the special guest, Bangladesh Bank (BB) Governor Dr Saleh Uddin Ahmed said only about five per cent of migrant workers from Bangladesh are well paid professionals, while the majority are low wage workers who send small amounts at regular intervals.

The flat fees charged by the banks and money transferors for these remittances tend to be high relative to the amounts received, he said, adding that such high costs through the formal system results in large volume of remittances of migrant workers being siphoned off by illegal informal channels.

A Challenge Fund provided by the British DFID under Remittance and Payments Partnership Project being implemented by the BB will improve the delivery of remittances and other financial services to the underserved population, he said.

Speaking as the special keynote speaker, former adviser to the caretaker government Rokia Afzal Rahman said checking exploitation of the migrant workers is the most important issue to be looked into in detail.

"If I were in the government, I would declare the manpower as the thrust sector," she said stressing the need for enhancing skills of the workers. If only a 6-month training is provided to the workers before going abroad, the remittance would be three times the present amount, she added.

The government should try sending the returnee skilled workers to the developed countries for better jobs, Rokia said, adding, "It would open a new era for Bangladesh if it could train up the nurses and send them to various developed countries."

Highlighting the importance of the ratification of the UN Convention on the migrant workers, RMMRU Chairperson Prof Tasneem Siddiqui said the convention provides a comprehensive definition of migrant workers including those who are engaged in a remunerative activity in a state of which they are not nationals.

"For the first time the convention recognises migrants as the social beings rather than looking at them as economic entities," she said, adding that it ensures full applicability of human rights to all workers – male and female – as well as their family members.

Making a strong demand for ratifying the convention, Dr Tasneem Siddiqui said there are misconceptions that ratification of the UN convention will damage labour market for Bangladesh, but the fact is Sri Lanka and the Philippines which ratified it have not faced any adverse repercussions regarding labour migration.

Migrant workers face hardship at home due to fraudulent practices of a quarter of recruiting agencies and at the destination countries due to arbitrariness of the employers and discriminatory policies of those countries, she said.

Even after returning, their plight continues due to the absence of institutional opportunities for economic reintegration, Tasneem Siddiqui pointed out saying the UN

convention therefore would be a tool to address these issues.

The Daily Star Editor and Publisher Mahfuz Anam, who moderated the first part of the dialogue, said the migrant workers are immensely contributing to the economy of the country, but their concerns were not properly considered.

The recruiting agencies engaged in malpractices, that lead to exploitation of the workers, must be punished, he said, adding, "This is an area you cannot leave untouched. If money talks, then this sector should talk."

The remitters of around \$6 billion yearly, however, do not have a strong voice, he said, urging the government to take strong steps to ensure their fundamental rights.

Speaking at the dialogue, Manusher Jonno Foundation Executive Director Shaheen Anam expressed her surprise that instead of receiving respects migrant workers are being exploited when they are giving life to the economy of the country.

The workers in agriculture, garments sector and migrant workers do not get due importance as they do not have the bargaining power, she said, demanding strong steps to punish the unscrupulous manpower export agencies that are responsible for the exploitation of the workers.

The speakers at the working session on reforms in the banking sector for encouraging increased flows and efficient utilisation of migrant remittance pointed out that remittance flow is often hindered due to procedural complications.

They pointed out that the flow of remittances could be doubled to \$12 billion from existing \$6 billion if procedural complications were removed and bank branches were brought under electronic connectivity.

They demanded special incentives for regular remitters, formation of a new bank for expatriates, mobile banking system, enactment of a customer protection law for the migrant workers and allowing bank officials to source countries to explore new areas for remittance earning.

The speakers said the incentives should not only be for those who send larger amounts but also for those who send smaller amounts and provide significant contribution to the flow of remittance.

The banks still handle remittances using the old system and most of the bank branches in the rural areas lack e-bank connectivity. The mobile banking system also can make significant contribution in this regard.

Khandakar Muzharul Haque, executive director of Bangladesh Bank, chaired the session.

An international bank for Bangladesh expatriates can solve a lot of problems which they have been facing for long, said Baizid Sarker, an official of Bangladesh Bank. He pointed out that such a bank could even play as an alternative to the World Bank.

The bank would be able to finance mega projects like the Padma Bridge, Deep Seaport and Jamuna Bridge, which are now being financed by the World Bank, he explained.