

Bhutan to help

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understanding (MoU) on cooperation in the health sector.

The deals were signed in presence of Hasina and Thinley.

Bhutanese Foreign Secretary Dasho Daw Penjo signed the two deals on behalf of his government while Health Secretary Hymayun Kabir and acting Cultural Affairs Secretary Suraiya Begum signed for Bangladesh government.

According to the agreement on cultural exchange, Bangladesh and Bhutan will exchange cultural delegations on regular basis.

Under the MoU on health cooperation, Bangladeshi doctors will be employed in Bhutan.

About Bangladesh's interests in flow of river water, Thinley said Bhutan is highly conscious about free flow of river water down stream through Bangladesh.

The premier said the mighty Brahmaputra has recently been prone to frequent flooding which has made it necessary for the two countries to regularly share data and arrange consultations among the water experts.

"I hope such cooperation will safeguard our development efforts, environment and eco-system until an institutional mechanism is established for joint water management," Hasina said.

Eulogising Hasina for her "thoughtful and pragmatic" leadership, Thinley supported her proposal for introducing package tourism among Bangladesh,

Bhutan and other neighbouring countries in the region.

"The hills and valleys of Bhutan and the mangrove forests of the Sundarbans with the golden beach of Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, could attract tourists, even from among us," Hasina observed.

The premier said if necessary, Bangladesh could also contribute skilled and semi-skilled workers in the required sectors in Bhutan.

About climate-change impact on both the countries, Hasina said she always voiced the case of Bhutan and other Least Developed Countries (LDCs) in all international climate-change meetings.

Bangladesh and Bhutan could work for proper management of natural resources, biodiversity and ecology, she said.

Observing that flow of Bangladeshi products to Bhutan has remained extremely low, Hasina said Bangladesh's private sectors could be encouraged to export apparels to Bhutan.

Besides, Bhutan can also encourage Bangladeshi entrepreneurs to invest in Bhutan's IT, agro-processing, education, hospitality and construction sectors, she said.

Thinley paid rich tributes to the memories of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. He said like Bangabandhu, her daughter Hasina is also working for economic emancipation of the masses.

The government's vision

2021 for digital Bangladesh has also earned appreciation of the Bhutanese premier.

Thinley told Hasina that her vision and development programmes have increased her popularity not only in Bangladesh but also in other countries.

"You are very popular in Bhutan," Thinley told Hasina.

The Bhutanese premier also recalled historic contribution of Atish Dipankar (980-1052), a Buddhist scholar from Vajrayogini village in Bikrampur (Munshiganj) who spread Buddhism and knowledge across the world.

Hasina expressed Bangladesh's gratitude towards Bhutan for its active role during the Liberation War in 1971.

She invited fourth King Jigmi Singye Waangchuck to visit Bangladesh at his convenience.

The PM also invited Bhutan's fifth King Jigmi Khesar Namgyel Waangchuck to attend the celebrations of the 40th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence on March 26 this year.

Foreign Minister Dipu Moni, Health Minister AFM Ruhul Haque, Economic Adviser to the PM Mashiur Rahman and M Ziauddin, ambassador at-large, were present.

Jail killing

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acquired six former army personnel including Marfat Ali and Abdul Hashem on charge of killing national leaders Syed Nazrul Islam, Tajuddin Ahmad, AHM Qamruzzaman, and Captain Mansur Ali in Dhaka Central Jail on November 3, 1975.

The SC passed the order allowing the government to move the regular appeal before it against the HC verdict. It came up with the order after holding hearing on the leave to appeal filed by the government on September 14, 2008, challenging the HC judgment.

Anisul Huq, principal state counsel for the case, told reporters that the SC granted their leave-to-appeal petition on two grounds: the HC judgment was a distorted one since it did not properly examine the documents and evidence, and it did not follow the relevant principles in respect of delivering judgment.

Of the six army personnel acquitted by the HC, Lt Col (dismissed) Syed Farooq-ur Rahman, Lt Col (retired) Sultan Shahrar Rashid Khan, Maj (retired) AKM Mohiuddin Ahmed, Major (retired) Bazul Huda were executed on January 27 last year following their conviction in Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman murder case.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam argued for the state during yesterday's hearing.

SC moves to reduce

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have power to hear and dispose of those.

Speaking anonymously, an SC official said when they started scrutinising the pending cases, they found at least 39 cases for bail were filed in 1996 and are still pending with the HC, although those were supposed to be disposed of many years ago.

Similarly, many such cases for bail are being piled up every year since 1996.

The sources say though the litigants and their lawyers come to the HC for bail or quashing criminal charges, after getting an immediate remedy many of them take dillydallying strategy for disposing of the cases.

When the accused come to the High Court for quashing criminal charges against them, many of their lawyers seek stay on the cases and obtain it for a certain period. On completion of the period many of the lawyers again come to extend the stay, not to dispose of the case.

"This is a longstanding attitude and practice, for which many such criminal cases are piled up with the High Court year after year," says an SC source.

Many involved in the functions of the higher judiciary believe there might be many reasons for lawyers and their clients to be reluctant to dispose of such cases.

Some of them say as the accused get relief obtaining repeated stay on the cases against them, they prefer to pass years using this strategy because the case, if disposed of, might go against them.

There is another benefit of this dillydallying. If a client passes many years obtaining repeated stay on the criminal case against him, it would be difficult to get evidence and witnesses for the complainant of the case or victim to prove the charges.

Besides, if a case continues for long, it is a good long-term source of income for the lawyer of the case. So most of the lawyers also prefer to keep the cases pending, the sources say.

The sources add there was an influx of cases for obtaining anticipatory bail in 2009. Still over 11,500 such cases are pending with the HC and one of the lawyers and their clients is interested to pursue those cases for disposal.

Those who have obtained anticipatory bails in 3,200 of the over 11,500 cases are now fugitives.

When the accused go to the HC for anticipatory bail, the court gives them a certain period and asks them to surrender before the trial court, says an SC official.

If the HC does not extend the period of bail or the accused does not surrender before the trial court, they become fugitives.

In the 3,200 cases of 2009 those who appeared first before the HC for bail did not reappear in any court after obtaining anticipatory bail.

So, the CJ has taken the initiative to quickly dispose of such cases and has taken necessary steps to dispose of the cases filed before 2009, sources say.

Besides, the CJ has also taken steps for hearing and quick disposal of those anticipatory bail cases in which the HC had issued rule and stay order but which are still pending for long.

CJ Khairul on January 3 at a full court meeting asked all HC judges to hear and dispose of the old cases on priority basis so that the litigants can get relieved of harassment of delay and the backlog of long pending cases is reduced.

The sources say after assuming office on September 30 last year the CJ found that there were 40,000 cases which were filed with the section concerned of the SC but were not heard by any bench of the HC for long.

As a result, the authorities dropped those cases from the list of pending cases in the HC in last November.

The sources say the SC is looking into many thousand other pending cases to take necessary steps for quick disposal.

Meanwhile, Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) President Khandker Mahbub Hossain expressed his stance against such a move of the chief justice.

He argued that lawyers could earlier pray to the HC for hearing their cases, but now they cannot do that due to the chief justice's decision.

The lawyers are now disappointed as they cannot take preparations for moving the cases fixed by the chief justice and cannot give relief to their clients, he said, adding, a damage took place in respect of trial of cases in the HC.

The SCBA president said if the chief justice does not change the decision, an untoward incident may occur in the judiciary.

"We have called a meeting of the lawyers to take decisions in this regard," he said.

However, some other jurists including the attorney general have expressed positive views over the CJ's moves.

Dr M Zahir told The Daily Star that the chief justice has taken the decision for disposal of cases of 2009 and 2010 on priority basis, as he considered it well.

"What is wrong with his decision?" he asked. He however said such a decision may hamper any lawyer's interest, but the chief justice should have discretion to take such decision.

A former chief justice told The Daily Star on Monday that the current CJ's intention and initiatives are good both for the judiciary and the litigants.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam said the chief justice has taken the decision in the interest of litigants and for the welfare of the judiciary.

The chief justice has taken the steps to quickly dispose of the pending cases in a fair manner and to ensure justice for the litigants, he added.

He said a section of lawyers are intentionally opposing the measures taken by the CJ in order to make him controversial, since he has delivered some historical and epoch-making judgments to establish the spirit of the Liberation War, democracy, rule of law and justice in the country.

They are criticising the chief justice as their "professional interest" has been damaged due to his wise and timely steps, Mahbubey Alam observed.

Another legal expert Dr Shahdeen Malik said overall it is a positive step.

He however said as there are somewhat sweeping decisions, there may be instances in which a particular client may be very adversely affected.

Nevertheless if the lawyers concerned are diligent, they can ensure that their clients are not adversely affected, he said.

Shahdeen Malik said any reform measure is not welcomed by all, and the criticism is a healthy part of the reform process.

He added he is sure this criticism will lead to necessary changes in the reform process.

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and transport so much petroleum overnight through rail and river systems.

The PDB itself has funded a Tk 27 crore project for the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority to dredge the rivers in Gopalganj and Daudkandi where poor navigability would jeopardize year-round transportation of petroleum. The other river routes will not dredging for now.

The PDB invested another TK 50 crore with the Bangladesh Railway to for upgrading some rail tracks and tank wagons that would carry the additional petroleum.

Seventy percent of the additional fuel would be transported through the river routes and the rest through the rail system.

Meanwhile the BPC is increasing its storage capacity. The BPC would also turn to the private sector to store the additional oil at times, sources said.

About half of these new power deals signed last year are rental power projects. These are short term solution with contract period not exceeding five years. The government chose these as a quick solution to minimize load shedding in the upcoming lean season when power demands will shoot high for the purpose of irrigation.

Of these rental power projects, a few have already launched operations while several have failed to meet deadlines.

"But we are expecting that by April, most of the rental power projects would be able to launch their operations. These will reduce the load shedding during that period," the PDB chairman added.

By September next, the PDB expects to have several hundred megawatts of base load power generation.

By next year, the government aims at achieving zero load shedding.

56 more cases

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The committee examined around 1,479 cases, identifying 56 as 'politically motivated' and recommended withdrawal of those, the state minister told the journalists.

Cases filed against former AL lawmaker Mokbul Hossain and former chairman of Proshika Manobik Unnayan Kendra Dr Kazi Faruk are among those recommended to be withdrawn.

The minister said 586 cases were not recommended for withdrawal as the committee did not find them as 'politically motivated' while 837 more cases will be reviewed at the next meeting.

Among 10,489 cases analysed at 25 meetings of the committee, a total of 6,788 cases have been withdrawn so far. Most of these were filed against AL leaders along with other professionals during the tenures of the caretaker government and the BNP-Jamaat Alliance.

Although these have been grouped under the category of "politically motivated cases," many of the cases involve theft, robbery, repression of women, murder, acid-throwing, rape, land and river grabbing, drug-trading and possession, and trafficking.

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