

PM off to NY

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address the UN General Assembly on September 24. The UNGA General Debate will formally begin on September 21.

She is due to attend a reception to be hosted by US First Lady Michele Obama on September 22 and hold bilateral talks with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon the next day.

Tomorrow, the PM will address a symposium on counterterrorism to be organised by the UN secretary-general. Among others, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton would attend it.

She is also scheduled to speak at a high-level meeting on prevention and control of non-communicable diseases at the General Assembly Hall.

On the day, following her speech on counterterrorism, the prime minister would also give interview to foreign media.

Hasina would attend the ICT Awards Night at her hotel when she would give a speech highlighting the concept of Digital Bangladesh.

A total of 15 heads of government and state, media mogul Ted Turner and World Bank President Robert Zoellick have already confirmed their attendance at the programme, sources at the foreign ministry said.

The prime minister will attend a dialogue on climate change at New York Palace on September 20.

She would attend a seminar on "Every Woman and Every Child", where the UN secretary-general and the Norwegian president would speak.

On September 22, the prime minister would present a keynote speech at the UN programme on Economic Empowerment and Rural Women and Food and Nutritional Security at Teachers' Building.

The next day, Bangladesh Caucus Co-chair Congressman Joseph Crowley and senior members of Congress would meet Hasina at her hotel suite.

Also, on the day, she will have bilateral meetings with the presidents of South Sudan and Slovenia the prime ministers of Turkey and Nepal.

After delivering her speech at UNGA on September 24, the prime minister would attend a press conference with local and international media at Bangladesh Mission.

The prime minister is scheduled to leave for home on September 28.

Palestinian

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want," said Jaja Cocjanic, spokeswoman for EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton.

Russia has said it will vote in favour of the Palestinian move, and on Friday US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton phoned her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov to discuss "certain issues of the Middle East situation," including the Palestinian UN bid, a foreign ministry statement in Moscow said.

And China newspaper editorials on Friday warned US that use of veto against the bid would fan the rage of Arabs against the western power. US has confirmed its use of veto power when the bill will be presented before the security council.

The efforts of the quartet— which groups the European Union, the United States, Russia and the UN—are part of an intense international diplomatic push in recent weeks aimed at persuading the Palestinians to drop their UN plans.

Washington and Israel say a UN vote over Palestinian statehood would damage chances for peace negotiations, arguing that a state can only be created through a settlement between the two sides.

"It doesn't bring the two sides closer together. It would not bring the Palestinians any closer to statehood, and we believe that it would be counterproductive to that goal," said White House spokesman Jay Carney Thursday.

"Our approach is one that we think is in the interests of helping the Palestinians reach their ultimate goal, and the only way they're going to reach that goal is through direct negotiations with the Israelis."

The EU, in addition to such concerns, is also facing potential embarrassment at the international forum if a vote splits its 27 members into three camps -- those backing the bid, those opposing it and a possible group of states abstaining.

Army pressed

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dissuade the advocates of the move from pursuing it since, according to several US embassy cables, many key politicians including the then BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and AL presidium member Amir Hossain Amu were very enthusiastic to join the proposed unity government.

The move got renewed impetus when high-ranking military officers including the then army chief Moeen U Ahmed at a meeting on August 5, 2007 agreed in principle to form a national unity government, according to leaked diplomatic cables posted on WikiLeaks.

An Anti-Corruption Commission attorney who worked closely with the military and was present at the meeting told US embassy officials about the discussion.

"According to him [ACC attorney], the military officers present [at the meeting] discussed the idea of a national unity government, and ultimately agreed it could be implemented without the imposition of martial law," the then US charge d'affaires Geeta Pasi wrote to Washington on August 7.

During the emergency rule in 2007-08, some ACC lawyers were engaged in the anti-corruption crackdown on politicians and businessmen launched by a military-led high-powered body.

Also, former BNP lawmaker Gasuddin Quader Chowdhury, who sided with reformist leader Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan's faction but maintained ties with party chief Khaleda Zia, told US embassy officials about the August 5 meeting, the cable said.

According to the formulation the senior army generals discussed, the then chief adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed could remain in place, with an expanded government to include the reformist wings of BNP, Awami League and members of the newly formed PDP, it reads.

The then BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan and AL presidium member Amir Hossain Amu and some other politicians were very enthusiastic about joining the unity government, a number of cables from the US embassy in Dhaka say.

"Amu and Bhuiyan have both told us they could not agree to participate in a government headed by Chief Adviser [Fakhruddin] Ahmed since he never rose above the level of secretary [deputy minister] in the civil service. Since both had served as ministers, they would not submit to working for someone they considered an "underling," Pasi wrote in the August 7, 2007 cable.

Earlier on March 18, 2007, Bhuiyan told the then US ambassador Patricia A Butenis that Gonoforum president Dr Kamal Hossain and Muhammad Yunus might be part of the national unity government, and a referendum might be necessary to validate this government and its actions. Butenis sent the cable the next day.

Bhuiyan confirmed he aspired to take over the BNP leadership once the military persuaded Khaleda Zia to leave Bangladesh, she wrote. He was also considering leading a new national government, replacing the then caretaker regime, to carry out reforms before the next general elections.

Meanwhile, Amir Hossain Amu had expressed his impatience in the mid-2007 over the "delay" in forming a national unity government, the August 7 cable says. Amu said he and several other anti-Hasina Awami League leaders would not even mind a declaration of martial law if necessary, Pasi quoted the AL leader as saying.

In defence of formation of the national unity government, according to Geeta Pasi, several "reformists" from both the major parties -- AL and BNP -- have raised the issue with the embassy officials and argued that "a government without political elements lacks credibility and will fail."

At a meeting on August 1, 2007, Pasi wrote, Bhuiyan argued the country was "on the edge" and the only solution was the creation of a national unity government which would include "profession-

sional politicians" from BNP and Awami League.

"They know how to handle the country," he said. "This caretaker government is all technocrats. They do not understand the people," the cable quoted Bhuiyan as saying.

Pasi also wrote these reform elements argue it would be difficult for them to carry out reform unless they were given a share of the power.

"Why should our party activists desert Khaleda Zia and rally around us unless they know we are in a position to do them favours?" said former BNP MP Zahir Uddin Swapon, who attended the August 1 meeting.

In June, Swapon told embassy's political officer of a plan to expand the council of advisers to include reformists from the BNP and AL and members of the new Progressive Democratic Party (PDP) of Ferdous Ahmed Qureshi. "This coalition would run in the next parliamentary elections as a bloc," said the cable quoting Swapon.

"Over the past six months, we have been told several times by various political interlocutors that a "government of national unity" is imminent," Pasi wrote on August 7.

Another diplomatic dispatch reveals that the plan for national unity government was conceived immediately after the declaration of the state of emergency on January 11, 2007. The next day, the caretaker government led by Fakhruddin Ahmed was installed.

In that cable sent on February 20 the then US ambassador Patricia A Butenis wrote the formation of a "national unity" government, by definition, almost "implies a longer and broader tenure than just a 'caretaker' regime".

"Its military backers envision a body of technocrats and a few defectors from the main political parties to serve as the executive body of a military-driven reform agenda," wrote Butenis, who was one of the leading diplomats working behind the scenes to break political impasse from late 2006 to early 2007.

On the mixed reaction to Yunus' plan to float a political party, Butenis wrote: "The negative reaction of political leaders was unsurprising since he projects himself as an alternative to their failed leadership, but popular reaction did not mirror the national rapture that greeted his Nobel Peace Prize."

During his April 8, 2007 meeting with US embassy officials, the Nobel laureate discounted rumours he would lead the national unity government.

He said he would officially launch his new party once the government lifted its ban on political activities. "He plans to develop the party structure from the grassroots and has held informal discussions with possible political allies about joining his movement," read a cable on the meeting.

WHAT AMU AND SWAPON SAY

Contacted by The Daily Star on Friday over the phone, Amu outright rejected what the cable revealed about him.

"I had met once with Geeta Pasi before the declaration of the state of emergency," said Amu, now a member of AL advisory council. "Some other Awami League leaders were also present at that meeting and we had discussed who will lead the next caretaker government as we were opposing Justice KM Hasan's appointment as chief adviser."

He had never said what the cables quoted him as saying, claimed the AL leader.

Zahir Uddin Swapon told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday that during the tenure of the past caretaker regime he held several unofficial talks with US embassy officials on several occasions.

The former lawmaker, who was currently in London, said he had backed the plans of a national unity government amid threat of a martial law looming in the country.

He thought such a unity government-- participated by all the political parties -- would be better than a military regime or the then controversial caretaker administration, added Swapon.

Dev projects

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In response, Abu Alam Md Shahid Khan, secretary to Local Government Division, advised them to tactfully overcome the barrier.

"I will place the issue before the LGRD minister. But before that, you have to perform your duties maintaining checks and balances," he said.

He, however, declined to entertain the CEOs' demand for complete authority over their district councils to discharge duties independently.

Speaking at the meeting, Swapon Kumar Sarker, director general of Local Government Division, said lawmakers' confrontation with upazila chairmen hamper development.

"Elected upazila chairmen want to ensure their interests in the projects. And they mount pressure on the CEOs, as they sometimes cannot express need to the lawmakers. In such a situation, it's tough for a CEO to prepare development projects," added Swapon.

"We have to think whether we will take concerted efforts for development or bow down to pressure of a few people [MPs and upazila chairmen]," Moinuddin Abdulla, divisional commissioner of Dhaka, puts the blame on the existing law that make MPs advisers to the district councils.

He said the Zilla Parishad Act says the parishad officials must seek opinions from MPs on development activities. "Misusing the authority, MPs often harass zilla parishad officials," he added.

Almost all CEOs, who spoke at the meeting, said they have to run after the MPs to take approval of development projects.

"Sometimes the ministry gives us a little time to send a project proposal to it. But we cannot send the proposal to the ministry without a nod from the local MP," Ahmed Ali, CEO of Khulna Zilla Parishad, said.

He also said as per the law, upazila chairman is a member of the district's development coordination committee.

"Taking the advantage of being member of the coordination committee, an upazila parishad chairman often demand money and favours unduly from us," said Abdul Hannan, director, Local Government Department, Khulna Division.

A number of CEOs also claimed both MPs and upazila chairmen demand their money shares for their cooperation and the go-ahead to development projects.

CEOs of Jamalpur, Lalmonirhat, Kishoreganj, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Rangpur, Dhaka, Gazipur and Faridpur zilla parishads also brought allegations against MPs of interfering in the parishads' activities.

Four killed

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area around 7:00am, leaving the four in the car dead on the spot, said Kaliganj police.

The lawyer's father-in-law Arash Ali, 60, was also critically injured in the accident and was undergoing treatment at a local clinic.

Ten passengers of the bus were injured as it fell into a roadside ditch after crashing the car.

They were admitted to upazila health complex and other local clinics.

Police recovered the bodies and sent those to Gazipur Sadar Hospital morgue for autopsies.

Later, the bodies were handed over to a relative of the deceased in the afternoon.

Plane crashes

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blame but were awaiting the results of an official investigation.

Amateur video of the accident in Reno captured the moment the P-51 Mustang fighter, called the "Galloping Ghost", smashed almost vertically to the ground near a packed grandstand.

"I did have an opportunity to visit the site, and it is horrific," Nevada Governor Brian Sandoval told reporters.

Witnesses said the aircraft crashed into an area of boxes -- roped-off areas for spectators -- while one said the pilot prevented even greater casualties by swerving to avoid hitting the grandstand itself.

Mike Houghton, the head of the Reno Air Racing Association, put the number of injured at 54 people and said the pilot was killed. He had previously put the pilot's age at 80.



Stolen cars and motorbikes recovered by the detective police from the capital and the port city. Nine suspected hijackers arrested yesterday are in handcuffs.

PHOTO: DB

Sharp rise in carjacking

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other crimes. He said stolen cars are often used for drug peddling, arms dealing and mugging.

According to DMP officials, so far this year around 500 cars have been reported stolen. In July and August alone, 133 cars were reported stolen and 76 were recovered. In June, 56 cars were stolen, in May 51, in April 54, in March 63, in February 45 and in January 51.

It is horrifying that police records show there were 2,094 carjacking incidents in last three years and they recovered only a third of

them (693 vehicles) and arrested 1,397 suspects.

But sources and police also say that the actual figure of carjacking incidents is much higher as most incidents do not get reported. Unless criminals get away with the vehicle, owners do not bother to inform police of the matter even if they suffer injuries.

Police sources say that over 30 gangs of carjackers with 200 criminals operate in the capital alone and they have clever and innovative ways of carjacking. Some use firearms while some use ropes to strangle drivers to

death. Some use chemicals to neutralise them while some poison drivers to take their vehicles.

Masudur, who led the Car Theft Prevention Team since its launch in 2007, said there are some gangs who are experts in changing chassis numbers and making fake BRTA documents. Stolen vehicles are mostly sold off in remote areas far away from the capital with fake chassis numbers and BRTA (Bangladesh Road Transport Authority) documents, he said.

However, sources claimed that stolen vehicles

do ply the city streets. They said even large corporations use stolen vehicles unknowingly as they have to rent a number of vehicles.

The government on August 10 made installation of global positioning system (GPS) mandatory for all motor vehicles to prevent carjacking and ensure road safety.

Several private companies are already providing GPS support on a small scale after obtaining licences from Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC).

Air force concern unfounded

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wars. The height of the metro system, however, comes down to only 10m as the train is about 6m high and electric connector 2m.

High-level official meetings have failed to resolve the dispute, plunging the \$1.7-billion project into trouble. Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), the lone financier of the project, is getting fed up with the delay and may withdraw from it, said officials familiar with the controversy.

Experts are worried that the air force's alternative route will damage the original architecture of the Sangsad Bhaban complex, a masterpiece of world famous architect Louis Kahn.

Mubasshar Hussein, president of the Institute of Architects Bangladesh, said they would resort to legal steps to prevent encroachment on the master plan of the Sangsad Bhaban.

"Major development projects are being obstructed one after another on the plea of saving Tejgaon airfield, which was owned by the civil aviation authorities and abandoned longback," he said.

Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, a noted civil engineer, dismissed as incorrect BAF's claim that 3,000 flights operate from the airfield annually.

Tejgaon airfield was abandoned in 1981 after Shahjalal International Airport, formerly Zia International Airport, was built in Kurmitola. It was then taken over by BAF, which operates mainly helicopters and training planes from here, Jamilur said.

The air force's claim that they operate C130 relief cargo planes from Tejgaon has been disputed by reliable official sources who refused to be identified as they are not allowed to speak to the media.

The sources said the cargo planes operate from Shahjalal airport. No commercial large-size aircraft has operated from Tejgaon airstrip during more than three decades since Shahjalal airport opened, said the official sources.

In case a war situation calls for, the metro operation will remain suspended as a defence strategy, Jamilur said at a recent ministerial meeting in presence of BAF officials.

Officials said an embankment was built around Shahjalal International Airport to save its runway

from flooding after it was submerged during floods. It is a flood-proof airport now, they said.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh, Tejgaon airstrip is one of the country's seven STOL (short take-off and landing) airports with a 9,000-foot long runway.

Ordinary military aircraft and STOL service can operate with one-third length of the runway while fighter planes may require two-thirds of it, said Prof Shamsul Hoque, a member of the metro rail project's technical committee, who teaches airport engineering (airport development) at Buet.

BAF operates most of its major military aircraft from Shahjalal Airport.

The 22-metre Bangabandhu Novo Theatre close to Tejgaon airfield is already an accepted obstruction in the funnel, he said, adding a lower-height metro rail should not be an additional problem.

There are already over two hundred buildings exceeding the approved height around the airstrip including BAF's Falcon Tower, Novo Theatre and IDB building within the air funnel.

About five years back, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha asked owners of the high-rise buildings including Falcon Tower to knock off the unauthorised height in compliance with the civil aviation rules.

The newly-built 15-storey building on cantonment land at Jahangir Gate is the latest addition to the list, said Prof Shamsul Hoque.

The Daily Star wrote to the authorities concerned through Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) seeking their comments on the points raised by the experts.

The paper waited for replies for nearly a month and repeatedly contacted the authorities. The reply from ISPR officials was that the armed forces authorities were "looking into the queries."

DISADVANTAGES OF ALTERNATIVE ROUTE

The alternative route will imply a 55-metre encroachment on the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban's (parliament building) master plan, an architectural marvel, and clash with the ramp of proposed Dhaka Elevated Expressway at Manik Mia Avenue.

It is almost impossible to obtain consent of the private investor of Dhaka Elevated Expressway hurriedly for

coordination, said competent sources speaking on condition of anonymity because of sensitivity of the dispute.

Metro rail requires adequate turning radius, which is absent at sharp turning at Khamarbari. That is why some pillars have to be set up occupying land into the eastern side of the Sangsad Bhaban complex.

ARMY'S OBJECTION
The army, meanwhile, has objected to the site of metro's depot in Pallabi, asking the authorities to move it farther north to save land belonging to Mirpur cantonment, said officials. It also cited security concern.

The army claims more than half of the 40-acre site is its land, said officials concerned. The rest is owned by Rajuk and Water Development Board. The site has to move towards north into Uttara model town to spare army land.

TO CONVINCETHEM
Official sources said a joint team of Dhaka Transport Coordination Board, Jica and experts had earlier met the air chief and sought his cooperation to resolve the issue in greater public interest.

The communications ministry had a meeting with the finance minister and representatives of BAF and army on August 10 to settle the issue.

JICA ANNOYED

Official sources said uncertainty in route alignment might force Jica, the lone financier, to withdraw from the project.

Jica intends to start feasibility study of the project by December and hold financial negotiations early next year, said officials concerned.

It is doing a pre-feasibility study of the project and has committed to providing a soft loan of 1.7 billion dollars at 0.01 percent interest rate. It was upset when route change first occurred in February.

The metro, otherwise known as mass rapid transit, is recommended in the Strategic Transport Plan as a key step to solve Dhaka's paralysing traffic gridlock.

The proposed metro will carry 50 thousand people per hour in one direction at affordable fare, according to project documents.

It will run from Uttara phase-three to Sayedabad through Pallabi, Rokeya Sarani, Bijoy Sarani, Farmgate, Shahbagh, TSC of Dhaka University, Doyel Chatter, Press Club, Paltan and Bangladesh Bank.

Macaws breed

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Since then he has been researching and experimenting on how to breed birds in captivity.

The climate and environment of the sub-continent is not ideal for macaw breeding, especially in captivity. This year, however, the female macaw laid eggs in a metal box containing cedar shavings and woodchips in April, June and again in August. The first four eggs were not fertile while the third batch of two eggs hatched.

The highly intelligent and magnificently colourful Brazilian species originally come from deep in the Amazon rainforest and are cherished as pets and familiar worldwide as showpiece birds.

The blue-and-gold macaw, also known as the blue-and-yellow macaw, is one of the largest and grandest of all parrots. The pattern of dark lines on the face of these parrots is unique to each individual bird. They are about 35 inches (90cm) in length from head to tail. They have an average lifespan of 50 years.

The practice of macaws being kept in captivity has continued since the 18th century. The first breeding of these birds occurred in 1818 in Magdeburg Zoo of Germany.

Most blue-and-gold macaws live in pairs or in family groups in the wild. Macaw pairs may join other macaws to form flocks. This happens especially during feeding, roosting and during migratory trips.

Even after reaching maturity, macaws stay with their parents for up to a year and start breeding after another two to three years.

Abdul Wadud also has a large collection of exotic macaw birds. The scarlet macaw, hahns macaw, Bourke's parakeet, rainbow lory, sun conure, African grey parrot, rock pebbler western rosella, port lincoln, electus parrot, kakariki, eastern rosella, chattering lory and black-capped-lory are some of the species in his collection.

Worker falls

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standing on a wooden platform outside the fifth floor and suddenly he slipped off, said Abdul Latif, officer-in-charge of Kafrul Police Station.

With severe injuries, Sujan was hurried to Dhaka Medical College Hospital where he died around 9:30am.