

Errant

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months and many Bangladeshi workers became irregular," said TAM Fakhru Basher, former manager at Mohammad Fahad al Geither Establishment in Riyadh.

Basher said he was not aware that his employer Mohammad Fahad had not paid premium to the GOSI for a long time. He came to know about it two years back, said Basher, who has been working in the kingdom for 26 years.

"Because of it, we cannot renew our residence permits or even get an exit visa," said Basher, who remains stranded in the kingdom with his wife.

Basher said nearly 10-12 thousand Bangladeshis are now in deep trouble because of their employers' failure to pay premiums to the GOSI.

He said even the body of Bangladeshi worker Anwar Hossain, who died of cardiac arrest in Saudi Arabia a few weeks ago, could not be sent back home for non-payment of premiums to the GOSI, he said.

Basher said his employer asked him and other employees to pay 300,000 Saudi Riyals each as premium money but it wasn't possible for them to pay the amount.

He then went to the Riyadh governor's office for permission to switch job, but couldn't get it. He later approached the foreigner assistance office, labour office and finally the passport office but failed to get any help from them.

"Not only me, several thousand Bangladeshis have become illegal and are now stuck here."

Fazlur Rahman, an engineer in Riyadh, said Saudi employers thought they could avoid paying premiums to the GOSI. But the authorities are now very strict about the enforcement of the GOSI law and many foreigners, mainly Bangladeshis, are in big trouble.

"They have become irregular for their employers' fault. Those wishing to go back home are not allowed to leave the kingdom," he told The Daily Star.

Shahidul Islam, Bangladesh ambassador in Riyadh, said he was aware of the issue and had been in touch with the Saudi authorities.

Wishing anonymity, another official at the embassy said it is easier to solve such problems, if a migrant worker contacts the embassy early. But it becomes very difficult to solve once it is late.

Another cold

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expected to hit after January 12, would be severer," said a duty forecasting officer in the Met office.

He said the second one would be moderate and might hit at the end of this month.

Bangladesh Meteorological Department warned in their latest long-range forecast that northern and central parts of the country would experience severe to moderate cold weather when the temperature could go as low as four degrees Celsius.

The Met office yesterday forecasted cloudy grey sky with occasional drizzles in some places of Comilla, Noakhali, Rajshahi, Khulna and Dhaka might continue today while the day and night temperatures would remain unchanged.

Dense fog would envelope different parts of the country, especially greater Rangpur, while medium fog will prevail in other areas particularly the river ports and shoals, the Met office said.

Already a few dozen lives, mostly of elders and children, were claimed in the first cold snap of the season in mid-December last.

Hospitals in northern districts were overwhelmed with patients suffering from cold-related diseases and the lowest temperature was six degrees Celsius in Jessore.

The forecasting officer said cold snaps are caused by chilly winds of Siberia blowing from a north-westerly direction.

Two cold waves in a single month are not uncommon, especially in January, the coldest month of the year, the official said.

Bright prospect

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started yesterday in The Daily Star Centre in the capital.

The speakers said use of ICT in healthcare gives an opportunity to health workers to intervene in communities by going beyond the traditional caring for the sick approach, and ensures wellbeing of all by focusing on nutrition and primary healthcare.

The traditional approach of seeking healthcare services after getting sick has failed even in developed countries like the US where only affluent people can afford healthcare facilities.

But use of ICT like cellphones gives an opportunity to intervene in communities before people get sick, through preaching behavioural changes such as adopting healthy practices like taking nutritious food and clean water.

Health workers or junior medical professionals of remote areas could link up with doctors and give them patient information for advice through cellphones. This approach ultimately would lead to wellbeing of people of all levels in a community, they added.

David K Aylward, an Ashoka fellow and a senior adviser to Global Health and Technology, presented the keynote speech while Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, delivered the welcome speech.

Health related experts from home and abroad spoke at the plenary session that turned into a platform for introducing global health technologies to an audience of 300 people.

David Aylward said Bangladesh is no exception in facing common global health concerns like maternal and neonatal death, poor nutrition, and chronic illness -- where 35 percent deaths of mothers and children is caused by malnutrition.

All these problems reduce the gross domestic product (GDP) by around two percent which could be easily avoided by changing the healthcare approach, he added.

In Bangladesh, where information technology is already booming, community health worker could collect, monitor and analyse patient's data. So if somebody got sick, the health worker could contact the junior consultant immediately, and could send the patient to a hospital if necessary, he pointed out.

David said ICT intervention starts with people, especially with mothers and children, who could be advised before they became sick. They could be told to use clean water or how to improve nutrition of food, which would give a baby not only a mere chance to survive but to live with full physical and mental potential.

It would be possible if the right information and technology could be provided to the right place and right people in the right form, he said.

"Bangladesh can leapfrog the painful experiences that the western countries

learned through ages, by just taking the successful practices by using ICT as a multiplier force," he said.

Mahfuz Anam said Bangladesh has many positive achievements gained over the years, at the same time many things are happening, many new technologies are coming to the global market which many Bangladeshi entrepreneurs and policymakers do not get a chance to explore.

Bangladesh could learn many lessons from the West and take their best while leaving out the worst as technologies provide that opportunity, he said.

Kimberly Rook of John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health said the Directorate of Health and the Department of Family Planning -- two key agencies of the government -- have been implementing two pilot projects of intervention in communities through cellphones for healthcare services.

Bangladesh could achieve great success in the use of ICT in healthcare since cellphones are the most widely used household technologies in both urban and rural areas, and since 80 to 90 percent of those people use cellphones in cases of health emergencies, she said.

Prof K Siddique-e-Rabbani, chairman of the Department of Biomedical Physics and Technology at Dhaka University, said at a technical session that his department is developing equipment under a government project for providing telemedicine across the country through internet.

Mridul Chowdhury, founder of mHealth, Bangladesh, described how intervention through cellphones can record more integrated and real time data about patients which the health promoters need to advise people. Such dissemination of health advices could reduce people's disease burden, he added.

Dr Kaosar Afsana of BRAC University described an experience of how 15,000 community health workers felt empowered and provided better services after getting cellphones.

Garry Merritt, a representative of Seattle Science Foundation described and showed from Seattle, through a video conference, the use of technologies in cardiac surgery.

While introducing the speakers, Sheikh Mahsinuddin, coordinator of the colloquium, said the event has been designed to provide an opportunity to introduce the knowledge and practices of global standard for development of Bangladesh.

Among the partners of The Daily Star's yearly leadership colloquium, Aziz Khan, chairman of the Summit Group, Nadia Samdan of the Golden Harvest, and Rashed Chowdhury of Citi Bank NA also spoke.

An exhibition about the use of ICT in health services has also been organised, which will be open for all today.

Latest Egypt vote brings Islamists closer to win

REUTERS, Cairo

The Muslim Brotherhood won more than a third of the votes in the last stage of elections for Egypt's lower house of parliament, according to partial results yesterday, which show the Islamists are set to dominate the legislature.

Banned under deposed President Hosni Mubarak, the Brotherhood has emerged a major winner from the uprising that toppled him, exploiting a well-organised support base to beat the rest in the first free legislative vote in decades.

The Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party list won 37.5 percent of the vote in the third and final stage of voting. Repeating a pattern seen in previous rounds, the headline Islamist Nour Party list came second in most of the districts after this week's vote, results on the party website showed.

The Islamists now look set to wield major influence over the shape of a new constitution to be drafted by a 100-strong body that the new legislature will pick, though the Brotherhood has promised that Egyptians of all persuasions will have a say.

'Successes'

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prices of fertilizer and rice; a day labourer's wage; and introduction of two waterbuses on the Sadarghat-Gabtol waterway.

The 11-page speech went on to list as a success the election of three women in the same number of reserved seats in every union parishad, though the system was introduced in her previous term. Likewise, it did not leave out her government's measures to increase hilsa production.

In all, Hasina took 42 minutes to read out the speech, delivered to mark the three years of her government.

Those who had drafted the speech took great pains to include every little success regardless of importance. They might have forgotten that it was the prime minister's address to the nation, not an account of her government's activities. They might have also lost sight of the fact that trying to describe everything in minute detail may make a speech dull.

A head of government addresses the nation on a very few occasions -- usually on the eve of the administration's anniversary or in a national emergency. Therefore, the speech should deal with major issues pertaining to the running of the state and programmes to be taken in the coming days.

Contrary to this notion, Hasina's address on Thursday shed little light on the government's plans and programmes for the remaining two years of its tenure.

It was long on the details of her government's successes and measures in the sectors of agriculture, power and energy, education, social safety nets and infrastructure.

The prime minister did not say much about the economic conditions or plans to boost people's confidence in the stock market by punishing those responsible for the bourse crash.

She did not elaborate on what steps her administration had planned to promote good governance, curb corruption, make parliament functional and strengthen local government bodies.

Public concern about the political turmoil brewing over the issue of caretaker government system was not addressed either.

The AL chief urged the opposition parties to give up confrontational politics and work for the people rising above partisan interests. But her call stands in stark contrast to the reality that the government in last three years took no steps to fulfil the electoral pledges to do away with the culture of confrontational politics.

Such call is sure to be dismissed as merely political rhetoric unless actions are taken.

Samson Chowdhury

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politicians, bureaucrats, business community leaders, bankers, industrialists, media personalities and the people joined the sobbing family members at the Kakrail Catholic Church in the city to say good-bye for the final time to Samson Chowdhury, who died on Thursday at the age of 86.

With tears rolling down her cheeks, widow Anita Chowdhury, who never came into the limelight despite her husband's outstanding career over five decades, raised her hands and sang along with her three sons, a daughter and in-laws in the praise of Jesus at the overcrowded church.

Samson Chowdhury's son Tapan Chowdhury thanked the well-wishers, admirers and friends of his deceased father. "We knew that people across the country loved our father. We did not know that they loved him so much..."

Archbishop Patrick D Rozario in his prayer said, "We realise Samson Chowdhury was a gift of God to his family, society, the country and to the global community. We thank you."

Samson Chowdhury has demonstrated real human values, he said, adding, "We pray that we can follow you. Oh God, grant him eternal peace."

People lined up to shower Samson Chowdhury with white flowers.

Earlier, long before the official funeral proceedings started at 11:00pm sharp, people from all strata started to gather at the church with flowers in their hands.

The flight of Singapore Airlines carrying Samson Chowdhury's body landed at the capital's Shahjalal Airport at 9:00pm. A Square Hospitals' ambulance arrived at the church around 10:45pm with the body.

Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow of Centre for Policy Dialogue, said Samson Chowdhury was an icon who proved how one can establish and flourish business focusing on human beings and services.

"He always had in his mind the people, creation of jobs, domestic demand and quality...he had a very modern mindset and was creative. He had a very strong sense of patriotism," Debapriya said.

What the young generation can learn from Samson Chowdhury is that one can flourish his or her business to any heights whilst being

honest, sincere and patriotic, he said. Samson Chowdhury will always remain the source of inspiration for the business community.

"He has also taken good care of his employees, and at the same time increased productivity of the companies. He worked keeping in mind the welfare of the workers. He was the human face of Bangladesh's business," said the noted economist.

AK Azad, president of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI), said he has not just set a conglomerate like the Square Group, he has inspired many entrepreneurs to dream and set up institutions like that.

"He himself was an institution. He has set examples for businessmen, industrialists and entrepreneurs in the country."

"His work was aimed at creating jobs so that the country can benefit economically," Azad said. "He helped businesses thrive in the country by effectively negotiating with the government to solve problems faced by the businesses."

"He believed in ethical business, which reflected in his work," said the FBCCI chief urging the young generation to learn from him.

Salman F Rahman, vice-chairman of Beximco Group, said, "Today we [Bangladesh] produce 99 percent of the pharmaceutical products for the domestic market. Samson Chowdhury has a great contribution in this. He was the one behind the Drug Policy which created scopes for the flourishing domestic pharmaceutical products."

"It is a big, big loss for the business community. He set an example. We hope that we can follow him," he said.

Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad said a good practice which Samson Chowdhury maintained is that he looked after the employees. He discussed with them to solve their problems.

Industrialist Anis Ud Dowla said Samson Chowdhury established Square Group on his own. "He was honest. His business ethics should be followed by us."

Politician Amir Hossain Amu said he created thousands of jobs in the country by setting up a number of companies. "I hope his sons and daughter will follow his legacy."

An emotionally-choked, former caretaker govern-

ment adviser Geeteara Safiya Chowdhury said, "He was an inspiration for all of us."

Samson Chowdhury's close associate Dennis Dilip Datta said he was a man of integrity and transparency. "He took his business to a great height, but never was a loan defaulter. His companies are listed in the stockmarket and have full transparency, which will continue to beso."

"Death is always sad but he has left us with such a legacy that we are proud of him," Dattasaid.

The body of Samson Chowdhury, who was best known for his business ethics, practices, sincerity, creativity, quality and innovation, would be kept at the mortuary of Square Hospitals, owned by the group he set up five decades ago.

His body would start for his village home in Aitakula of Pabna early in the morning after a short break at Square Group headquarters in Gazipur.

Many of the Square Group's 33,000 employees would pay their last respect there, said an official of Square Group.

Md Abdul Khaleque, general manager of Square Consumer Ltd, told The Daily Star the body is scheduled to reach Pabna at about 8:30am on Saturday. Then it would be kept at Aitakula village, the ancestral home of Samson Chowdhury, so that locals can pay their respect to the departed soul.

The body would be taken to Square Pharmaceuticals, Pabna plant at 9:30am before being buried at the family grave, Khaleque added.

Air Vice-Marshal (ret'd) AK Khandker, the planning minister, Sultana Kamal and Rokia Afzal Rahman, former caretaker government advisers, Abul Kalam Azad, press secretary to the prime minister, Morshed Khan, former foreign minister, Dr Iftekharuzzaman, executive director of Transparency International, Bangladesh, Transcom Group Chairman Latifur Rahman, Abdus Salam Murshedy, president of Exporters Association of Bangladesh, Fazlul Haque, former president of Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association, and Asif Ibrahim, president of Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, paid their tribute to the legendary industrialist.

Sakku won't

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The former mayor of now-defunct Comilla municipality, Sakku also said he will quit office if he fails to present the city dwellers any development in the next one year.

Nagorik Committee-backed candidate Sakku was speaking to journalists yesterday morning at his residence in Comilla.

He won Thursday's polls defeating the ruling party-backed contender and joint convener of Comilla district AL, Afzal Khan by around 30,000 votes.

Addressing the reporters, the new mayor vowed to work rising above the party interests for bringing desirable change in the city.

Sakku said he would prioritise resolving the city's five existing problems -- traffic jam, water logging, drug, education and health -- on an urgent basis instead of designing new development plans.

"Since I am pledge-bound to the people to develop the city, I will have to work for them."

"I am ready to listen to the people and to resolve their problems. I will surely step down from the post if I fail to improve the city within one year," he said.

"To come up with effective plan for resolving the crises, I will work in consultation with the ward councillors, civil society representatives and others," Sakku said.

Imam differs

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of the government is much higher than the failures.

Both the surveys published yesterday show that popularity of the ruling party declined in the last three years while BNP's increased.

However, the adviser disagreed with the results. The government has built the foundation which was necessary. "I think we will be able to move ahead a lot in the next two years."

Imam pointed that the government itself is conducting a survey on its successes and failures. When completed, it would be easy to say where the government failed.

The Prothom Alo carried out its survey on 5,000 people across the country, while The Daily Star surveyed 2,500 people. Two professional organisations conducted the surveys in the last part of 2011.

According to the surveys, most people think that the country is heading in the wrong direction.

But, Imam said, the government has achieved success in several sectors including agriculture, infrastructure, and energy and power.

On the price hike of essential commodities, he said, "We must remember that purchasing capacity of the people has also increased."

Around 73 percent people in the surveys opined for holding the next general elections under a caretaker government but Imam said different political parties told the government that the caretaker government is not necessary, rather a strong Election Commission is essential.

About the trial of war criminals--a high priority work of the government--47 percent respondents said they think the government is not taking proper steps. Two years ago, 86 percent people responded positively.

When asked, Imam said it should be considered that the trial have started after 40 years. Many witnesses have died while others have become too old to come to the front, he said.

He acknowledged that it took some time to form the prosecution team but now it has started to become stronger day by day. On the other hand, the investigation team has also become more efficient, he claimed.

"It's not true that the government doesn't want the trial. It's our main objective," he added.

According to the survey of Prothom Alo, 52 percent people think the Anti-Corruption Commission cannot carry out their work independently.

But, Imam differed saying that corruption has gone down since the ACC is now stronger.

Zero tolerance to BCL

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tough actions against the offenders and assured them that none will be protected," Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif told The Daily Star about the party's stance on Chhatra League leaders' unlawful acts.

Sources said Prime Minister and party President Sheikh Hasina expressed serious dissatisfaction over the Sathkira incident, in which top district leaders of Chhatra League were allegedly involved.

She asked Hanif to communicate with the superintendent of police of the district regarding tough actions against the alleged criminals.

"I myself have called the local administration of Sathkira and directed the officials there to take the highest legal action against the offenders," Hanif said.

"The party high command's decision is to take instant stern action against the troublemakers," he said.

In Sathkira, Chhatra League unit President Sheikh Jewel Hasan and General Secretary Nazmul Haque Palash allegedly attempted to violate a dance artiste Wednesday night.

Palash was arrested Thursday night after police was asked by the Prime Minister's Office to capture the culprits and punish them accordingly.

The dance artiste, also a college student, filed a case with Sathkira Police Station Thursday under the Women and Children Repression Preventive Act against four people including the president and general secretary of the district Chhatra League unit.

Chhatra League central committee dissolved the Sathkira unit and expelled

the accused president and general secretary from the organisation.

Meanwhile, top Chhatra League leaders also echoed the view of Hanif about not protecting the offenders.

Chhatra League President HM Badiuzzaman Sohag said, "We will not spare the leaders and activists who indulge in illegal and unlawful activities."

Chhatra League leaders and activists recently swooped on students in Buet, Kuet and Jagannath University. Khulna University of Engineering and Technology (Kuet) had to be closed sine die.

The activists have been accused of beating up students at different public universities and colleges across the country.

The pro-Awami League student body President Sohag claimed, "Chhatra League is not responsible for all the incidents that occurred on different campuses recently." He blamed conspiracies against the organisation.

He said Chhatra League has no organisational committee in Kuet and that is why, it cannot be blamed for the incident there. He said the incident in Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) was triggered by a row between a senior and a junior student and his student body had nothing to do with it.

It has been reported that Chhatra League activists attacked students of Kuet on January 2 as the students were protesting poor food served. The incident left 25 people injured.

A day later in Dhaka, Chhatra League activists attacked freshers of Jagannath University who were demonstrating against additional fees for admis-

sion.

On December 31, Chhatra League activists beat up a senior student of Buet that sparked a three-day students' protest. The Buet authorities later expelled two students and both of them were Chhatra League leaders.

Chhatra League is yet to take any action against the perpetrators of the three incidents.

Mid-ranking Chhatra League leaders expressed doubts to The Daily Star on whether anything concrete will actually be done against the culprits. They said the organisation can only expel people involved in anti-organisational activities but sometimes even that is not done.

BJP split over induction of corrupt ex-ministers

AGENCIES, New Delhi

BJP yesterday was seen divided over the induction of sacked Uttar Pradesh minister BS Kushwaha with Uma Bharti and Maneka Gandhi expressing their unhappiness and Yashwant Sinha backing him up.

"He (Kushwaha) was a part of Mayawati's corrupt government. Now he will bring to light all the wrong that was being done," senior BJP leader Yashwant Sinha was quoted as saying.

Gandhi said that the entire Uttar Pradesh unit of the BJP is upset over Kushwaha's arrival and Uma Bharti, has suspended her campaign for the UP elections, a claim which she later denied.