



Letter from Ilias' daughter

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The daughter of missing BNP leader M Ilias Ali yesterday handed over a letter to visiting US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton informing the top US diplomat about her father's disappearance.

The Daily Star received a copy of the handwritten letter. Below is the full text of the letter:

Dear Mrs. Hillary Clinton
Congratulations for visiting Bangladesh. I like to draw your kind attention that my daddy Mr. M. Ilias Ali, ex-parliament member, is a patriotic political leader & organizing secretary of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP). On 17 April, 2012, he was kidnapped at around midnight by some unknown thugs. No one is able to give my daddy back to me. It has been too long since he last kissed me. Everyday, before going to school, he used to kiss me but now there is none. I feel very sad & lonely. My world is empty without my dad. I know you love the people of Bangladesh very much. You are also a mother. I want to hug & kiss him again. I firmly believe that if Govt. is interested then my dad will soon come back to me.

So, please raise the issue to the Govt. of Bangladesh & help them to get my dad. Wish you brilliant success.

Best regards,
Saiera Nawal
Daughter of M. Ilias Ali

Inflation

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percentage point and stood at 9.93 percent last month, which was 10.10 percent in March, according to government data released yesterday.

Inflation soared to double digit in March last year and continued thus since then.

The prices of coarse and fine rice marked a fall and people's purchasing power also improved, pulling down inflation, said Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

Sins of Muslims

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security and the breakdown of unity that Islamic countries are facing these days is a result of the sins of the public and their transgressions," Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdulaziz Al al-Sheikh was quoted as saying by al-Watan newspaper.

In a Friday sermon, he accused "chaotic" people of wearing mask of "democracy and equality" for actions leading to injustice and instability within the umma, or Muslim nation.

Revolts that erupted last year have removed Arab autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen and are still raging in Syria and Bahrain. They gave voice to millions of people who suffered decades of repression but have alarmed Gulf Arab rulers.

Ties between Riyadh and Cairo were strained by the fall of President Hosni Mubarak, a close Saudi ally, and by the rising power of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, an organisation viewed with suspicion by many Gulf governments.

On Friday an Egyptian delegation visited Saudi King Abdullah to smooth a spat caused by protests at the Saudi embassy in Cairo, which had led to the recall of the Saudi ambassador. The king later ordered the envoy back Cairo and the embassy said he would return on Saturday.

Last month, the grand mufti was criticised after international media quoted him as saying all churches in the Arabian Peninsula should be destroyed, angering Christian bishops in Austria, Germany, and Russia. The comments could not be verified by Saudi officials.

Hilary meets Yunus

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residence of the US ambassador to Dhaka.

The meeting between Prof Yunus and Clinton, an ardent supporter of the pioneer of microcredit, comes almost a year after Prof Yunus resigned from Grameen Bank, which he set up three decades ago.

The meeting would take place at a time when the financial health of Grameen Bank is looking shaky and the government is apparently trying to take over about 50 legally independent associate organisations linked to the bank.

In March 2011, only five years after winning the Nobel Peace Prize, Prof Yunus was ignominiously thrown out of his job as managing director of the bank, which shocked many of his admirers and supporters around the world.

"The Banker to the Poor" had challenged the legality of the central bank letter in court. But the High Court upheld Bangladesh Bank's decision. He also had appealed against the verdict with the Supreme Court but the decision remained unchanged.

Prof Yunus, who also received the US Presidential Medal of Freedom, the King Abdul Aziz Medal, and the Ramon Magsaysay Award, resigned on May 12 last year to avert undue disruption in Grameen Bank activities.

Bangladesh Bank's move to remove him came several months after a documentary film was aired on a Norwegian TV channel alleging that Grameen Bank had transferred donors' money, given to Grameen Bank, to another sister organisation. This generated an uproar at home and abroad.

A section of Bangladeshi media jumped to take a swipe at him publishing fabricated stories one after another. At the same time, political heat was fanned with politicians belonging to the ruling alliance making provocative comments.

Later, Norway refuted the allegations saying no irregularities or corruption had taken place, giving Prof Yunus a clean chit.

The brazen removal of Prof Yunus from the bank has apparently started to affect profitability of its core business—a fact that was repeatedly stated by supporters of

Prof Yunus.

The bank incurred a loss of Tk 24 crore last year.

Grameen Bank is the first bank in the world, which provides money to poorer people without asking for collateral. Its 83.5 lakh borrowers, most of them women, own 97 percent of the bank.

Its microcredit operations have been copied across the world including the United States. It has lent \$10.3 billion since it began operations.

FM goes to Delhi

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here yesterday.

The joint commission, conceived as a foreign minister-level annual event during Manmohan's Dhaka visit seven months ago, will explore newer avenues for cooperation, they added.

Bangladesh has long been pressing for a Teesta water-sharing accord, which was expected to be signed during Manmohan's visit but was scuppered in the face of objections from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.

Mamata, meanwhile, had a meeting with Indian External Affairs Minister SM Krishna here two days ago, but none of them made official comments on whether they had discussed the Teesta issue.

India, on the other hand, has been pushing for an extradition treaty under which northeastern Indian insurgents allegedly holed up in Bangladesh will be sent back.

According to the itinerary released by the Indian external affairs ministry yesterday, Dipu Moni and her Indian counterpart SM Krishna will meet at The Oberoi Hotel tomorrow morning. The two will have a joint media interaction after the meeting.

Dipu will attend the concluding ceremony of the year-long celebration of Rabindranath Tagore's 150th birth anniversary at Vigyan Bhavan at 6:20pm.

On Tuesday, she will have separate meetings with Indian Minister for Water Resources Pawan Kumar Bansal and Home Minister P Chidambaram. She will then call on Manmohan Singh at his official residence.

BSF ears wide shut

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the BSF shot dead seven Bangladeshis between August and December last year, according to data of Odhikar, a rights body.

The BSF has killed 10 Bangladeshis and injured 43 others in the last four months.

The BSF chief, though, in an interview with BBC on January 7 said it is not possible for them to stop firing along the border. His statement showed the BSF's lack of willingness in lowering the number of border killings to zero.

Home Minister Shahara Khatun had toured India in February. During her trip, her counterpart P Chidambaram renewed his pledge. "We have reiterated that we don't intend to continue firing and killing along the border."

"We have identified 23 vulnerable border outposts. The two countries will strengthen the presence of the border guards at those points and undertake joint consultations," he added.

The BSF is using lethal weapons instead of rubber bullets at many of the 23 vulnerable points, said sources at Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB).

"The BSF is using rubber bullets only at some points and we cannot disclose those due to strategic reasons," Maj Gen Anwar Hossain, director general of BGB, told The Daily Star.

If the Indian border guards introduce rubber bullets at all the vulnerable areas, the killing of Bangladeshis will decline to a great extent, he said.

Bangladeshi cattle traders and agricultural workers are the major victims to the BSF shooting as they work at night in the fields near the border, he pointed out.

"We have initiated programmes to sensitise

vulnerable groups on the issue with the help of local elderly people, public representatives and Imams of mosques," said Anwar.

"We have advised the local cattle traders not to cross into India for fetching cattle risking their lives. Rather they should ask the Indian traders to send those to Bangladesh," he maintained.

The agricultural workers have been advised to inform the BGB personnel before going to work in bordering fields at night. The BGB members will inform the BSF about this in advance to ensure they do not open fire on the workers taking them for smugglers.

These intensive awareness programmes have been very effective in reducing border killings by the BSF, said the BGB chief.

The BSF in March proposed imposing curfews along the border at night, but the BGB disagreed. "Imposing curfews is only a temporary solution. It will not solve the problem at all, rather will undermine people's constitutional right to movement," he added.

Contacted, State Minister for Home Shamsul Hoque Tuku said, "Killing along the border is an old issue and I don't claim that such homicides have stopped."

"If we look at the statistics of border killings since our independence, we will notice a declining trend," he added.

He expressed satisfaction saying that the country for the first time has been able to convince India that killing on the border is inhuman.

According to statistics of Odhikar, the border killings have declined over the last few years.

The BSF has killed 31 Bangladeshis last year, 74 in 2010 and 96 in 2009.

JU strike

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to end their programme at around 4:00pm as eight students have been on hunger strike for five days at a makeshift camp in front of the VC's residence.

Earlier, agitating teachers under the banner of Shikhhak Samaj on Thursday postponed their demonstrations upon assurance from the PM.

The prime minister at separate meetings on Thursday asked representatives of both agitating teachers and followers of VC to break the deadlock.

Meantime, Shakila Sharmin, general secretary of Jahangirnagar Sangskritik Jote, following a press conference said they have called off the strike as they believe the PM would consider their one-point demand.

She added they would resume demonstrations if the PM failed to meet their demand. She demanded proper security measures on the campus as activists of Bangladesh Chhatra League are allegedly threatening general students.

Earlier, Kobi told the students the PM has already taken proper measures to overcome the stalemate at JU.

She also said Prof Shariff Enamul Kabir should step down as students [and also teachers] are going on hunger strike demanding his resignation.

On behalf of Bangladesh Committee of Cinema Directors, its President Md Abdul Hannan yesterday announced solidarity with the agitating students.

Following an attack on cultural activists by BCL on the campus on April 28 and arrest of two university teachers, students and teachers jointly staged demonstrations against the VC and embarked on hunger strike on May 1.

Pranab

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During his stay, Pranab will attend the closing ceremony of the joint celebration programme marking the 150th birth anniversary of Rabindranath Tagore.

He will call on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni and several other government leaders.

Bangladeshi leaders during their meetings with Pranab are expected to raise the issue of implementing a joint statement signed during the Indian prime minister's visit to Dhaka last year, said foreign ministry sources.

The Indian minister will also pay a courtesy call on BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia at her Gulshan office at 4:30pm.

Among others who received Pranab at the airport were Information Minister Abul Kalam Azad, Prime Minister's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi, Economic Affairs Adviser Dr Mashur Rahman and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Pankaj Saran.

Deadly clashes

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Officials at Al-Zahra University hospital said on Friday they received two people who died in the skirmishes outside the ministry. A frontline medic group said they died of gunshot wounds.

The health ministry reported one death and said he was a conscript soldier.

At least 296 people were also hurt in the clashes, the health ministry said in a statement, including 131 treated in hospital.

Earlier on Friday, military police charged the protesters, chasing them down side streets near the ministry on foot and in military vehicles, firing birdshot and assault rifles into the air amid chaotic scenes.

A blanket of thick smoke engulfed Abbasiya square, where several thousand secular and Islamist protesters had gathered, some marching there from Cairo's Tahrir Square, to denounce the ruling military council.

The clashes began when some protesters threw rocks at the military police, prompting troops to respond with water cannon and later tear gas.

Bleeding protesters were ferried away by motorbike and ambulances rushed to the scene, an AFP reporter said. State television showed several soldiers wounded.

Hold talks for credible polls

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priorities in Dhaka and Washington DC by turns.

"We want to see Bangladesh as a prosperous democratic country despite challenges of democratic process," said Hillary, who arrived in Dhaka yesterday on a two-day visit.

Her visit, first by a US secretary of state since 2003, reflects USA's growing interest in strengthening ties with Asian nations.

In 1995, Hillary visited Bangladesh as the US first lady with her daughter Chelsea. In 2000, Bill Clinton, the then US president and Hillary's husband, visited Bangladesh.

Hillary stressed the need for a consensus among all in Bangladesh on fundamental issues for the sake of democracy, sustainable development and the rule of law.

"Democracy must flourish in Bangladesh," she said.

"We support flourishing of democracy and the rule of law. We urge all political actors to work together for the good of this country."

Hillary said in a strong democracy "everybody has to be rowing in the same direction because you are all in the same boat. You are going to make progress together or you are going to run into very turbulent waters."

Everybody has a role to play in democracy, said Hillary.

"We came as a friend and partner...we raise these issues as we are friend and partner of Bangladesh."

On the Grameen Bank issue, Hillary said the Bangladesh government should allow the organisation to operate freely. She also underscored the need for picking an acceptable and respected person as its managing director.

Referring to the civil society's role, the top US diplomat said civil society is a model and inspiration for flourishing democracy in any country. It is essential that civil society groups operate freely in

Bangladesh.

Hillary said the killing of labour leader Aminul Islam and the disappearance of BNP leader Ilias Ali came up during the talks, and she urged the government to carry out thorough and independent investigations into the incidents.

"It is important that in this country ... everybody takes seriously any disappearance, any violence against activists, any oppression of civil society, any intimidation of the press...that is just what is required in the 21st century if democracy [is to be] sustainable."

She said Foreign Minister Dipu Moni assured that the government is probing all these incidents.

"Any violence, disappearance or repression on civil society and the press is contrary to democracy and rule of law."

She said weeks of strikes and protests that paralysed the country and killed at least five people had undermined development and scared off foreign investors.

"Violent demonstrations exact a heavy toll, especially on Bangladesh's poorest and most vulnerable citizens. They also send a negative signal to the international community about the investment climate here."

She, however, said, "We support democracy, freedom of expression, the right to peaceful assembly...We urge all to settle their differences through dialogue. We want democracy to sustain in Bangladesh."

Replying to a query on security in the Bay of Bengal, Hillary commended the present government for its policy of zero tolerance for terrorists, and said it prevented them from using Bangladesh as a transit and training point to commit violence against Bangladesh or any other country.

On Bangladesh-US security dialogue held last month in Dhaka, she said both the sides had very positive discussions on bilateral

defence cooperation and shared the values of peace and stability in the region.

Talking about Bangladesh's triumph in the maritime dispute with Myanmar, she said, "I think future of Bangladesh is extremely positive. It gives clear demarcation of the maritime boundary so Bangladesh can begin exploration of resources in the sea for the benefit of the people of Bangladesh."

The top US diplomat said she thinks there should be a room for cooperation to protect the investments regarding natural resources. She said it is important to have protection against piracy as maritime trade and exploration continue to increase.

Dipu Moni led a 10-member delegation at the bilateral meeting from 6:00pm to 7:15pm at the PMO. The delegation included Foreign Secretary Mijarul Quayes and Bangladesh Ambassador to the USA Akramul Qader.

Hillary led a seven-member delegation that included Robert O Blake, US assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, and Dan Mozena, US ambassador in Dhaka.

Speaking about exploration of natural resources, she said everyone is concerned about economic interests and security in the 21st century. "There has to be a clear understanding about what is yours and what is someone else's."

In her introductory remarks, Hillary said the USA wants Bangladesh to be a prosperous and successful democratic country that demonstrates sustainable development.

She stressed the need for consensus and cooperation among all actors in Bangladesh on fundamental issues to achieve the desired level of development.

"It is important for the USA to see rule of law and transparency, but it is not easy. Many countries have given up but you have never

given up because of your successful leadership," said the US secretary of state.

Hillary lauded Bangladesh's impressive progress in meeting the Millennium Development Goals and its role in UN peacekeeping.

Dipu Moni said at the joint press briefing that Bangladesh sought duty free and quota free access of its products to the US market and extension of the GSP facilities.

Bangladesh's inclusion in the Millennium Challenge Account and repatriation of a convicted killer of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman were raised during the talks, she said.

The foreign minister said the US side also raised a number of issues including governance, economic cooperation, counterterrorism and partnership on global issues.

Buddha Purnima

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The day marks Gautam Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death. It falls on the day of the full moon in May.

The day is a public holiday. Buddhist organisations have chalked out various cultural and religious programmes to celebrate the day.

This is the most important and solemn day of the Buddhists, and they observe the day with great pomp and grandeur.

The Buddha -- Siddhartha Gautam -- was born in the Shakya royal family in Lumbini in south Nepal. Using historical records referring to Alexander, the Great and Emperor Ashoka, the Buddha's birth date is usually given as May 563 BC.

President Zillur Rahman, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Leader of the Opposition Khaleda Zia in separate messages greeted the Buddhist community on the occasion.

Onus is on parties

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government of political repression.

Referring to the recent disappearance of BNP leader M Ilias Ali, she said people are panicked following the incident.

"Party's acting secretary general could not attend the meeting as he has been on the run due to police cases. We didn't declare any destructive programme, but the government is filing numerous cases against our leaders. Even we are not getting justice from the court," said Khaleda.

Hillary said these are sad incidents. She hoped the government will take necessary measures to overcome the situation and find and rescue Ilias in good health.

The secretary of state asked the BNP chairperson about the country's internal

situation including politics, said Shamsher, a former foreign secretary.

Khaleda said people want free and fair elections as it is a pillar of democracy. Election will not be acceptable to anyone if it is held without participation of all parties, she added.

Hillary, in reply, said she had discussed the issue with the Bangladesh government.

Shamsher said the US leader enquired about BNP's views on Bangladesh-US relationship.

Khaleda said if the US allowed duty-free access of Bangladesh ready-made garment products, it would have a positive impact on Bangladesh's economy and contribute a lot to women's empowerment.

Hillary appreciated the former premier for her

contribution to women's education in Bangladesh. Khaleda lauded the US leader for her role as the US secretary of state.

"As a woman I will be happy if you can reach a higher position like the president of the US," the BNP chief told Hillary.

"Nothing can be ruled out," responded the US leader.

During the meeting, missing BNP leader Ilias Ali's daughter Saiera Nawal handed over a letter to Hillary.

Accepting the letter, she said she had already discussed about Saiera's father with the government.

BNP standing committee member Dr Abdul Moyeen Khan, chairperson's adviser Reaz Rahman and Sabihuddin Ahmed were present at the meeting.

Zero tolerance for terrorism

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Hasina said that in the last three and half years, her administration contained militancy and terrorism with an iron fist.

She also said the government had enacted Anti-Human Trafficking Act 2011 to stop trafficking in women and children.

Appreciating Bangladesh's initiatives for regional connectivity with its neighbours Nepal, Bhutan and India, Hillary said the country would benefit immensely from it due to its geographical location.

During the meeting, the two leaders discussed various issues of bilateral interests including US investment in Bangladesh.

Hillary said the US-Bangladesh Partnership Agreement, which was signed yesterday, would help to further cement the existing relations between the two nations.

Welcoming the secretary of state, Hasina said the

United States is a tested development partner for the country's socio-economic development as well as for strengthening democratic institutions and women empowerment.

She urged the US to invest in the energy sector to help Bangladesh meet its energy demand in the next five years.

Requesting the US government for duty-free and quota-free access for Bangladesh RMG products to its market, the prime minister said it would help improve the living standards of the country's womenfolk.

She also sought US cooperation in combating the adverse impact of climate change and implementing mitigation programmes like afforestation, coastal embankment, cyclone shelters and dredging of major rivers.

PM's Adviser Gowher Rizvi, Ambassador-at-Large M Ziauddin, Bangladesh Ambassador to US Akramul Qader and Principal

Secretary Sheikh Waheeduzzaman were present at the meet.

Fire kills 14 in Peru drug rehab center

AFP, Lima

A fire killed 14 people trapped in a locked down drug rehabilitation center east of Lima with no means of escape, the city's fire department said Saturday.

"They have found 14 bodies and one person survived," said spokeswoman Elena Cabello of the fire in Chosica, 30 kilometers (19 miles) east of the capital.

The blaze comes just three months after 29 people were killed in a fire at another drug rehabilitation center in Lima.

The latest fire broke in the early morning hours at the Sacred Heart of Jesus rehabilitation center, which was housed in a two-story building, said Fernando Campos, the head of the firefighting unit on the scene.

Pakistan

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long as the Pakistani government and military continue to deny ethnic groups within Pakistan a right to self-determination," he wrote.

"American aid money for Pakistan will dry up. It is clear that the Pakistani military and intelligence services have for years diverted money intended to help the people of Balochistan, and the other provinces of Pakistan, into funding terrorism and buying weapons to repress their own people," Rohrabacher said.

Rohrabacher is Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee.

He along with Congressman Steve King and Louie Gohmert, introduced legislation on February 17, 2012 expressing the sense of Congress that the people of Balochistan have a "right to self-determination and to their own sovereign country."

Roadside blast kills 5 Afghan cops

AFP, Kabul

Five border policemen were killed when a roadside bomb ripped through their patrol vehicle in eastern Afghanistan, an official said yesterday.

The bomb struck their pick-up truck in the Dur Baba district of Nangarhar province, near the Pakistan border, late Friday, the provincial governor's spokesman told AFP.

"Yesterday evening, a border police vehicle was hit by a roadside bomb that unfortunately left all five border policemen dead," said spokesman Ahmad Zia Abdulzai.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility, but roadside bombs are regularly planted by Taliban insurgents fighting a decade-long war against NATO-led foreign troops and Afghan government forces.