

PM cooks to treat son on his birthday

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina took some time off from her busy schedule to cook food for her only son Sajeeb Wazed Joy on his 42nd birthday yesterday.

Joy posted a photograph of his mother on his Facebook page that showed Hasina cooking chicken wearing a white sari and a striped apron over it at Gono Bhaban.

The prime minister was seen stirring chicken in a pan with one hand and holding the pan with the other.

Joy, the eldest grandson of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, celebrated his birthday with his mother, his wife Kristine Overmeyer, daughter Sophia and sister Saima Wajed Putul in a low-key manner.

In the photo caption, he wrote in English, "A special treat for everyone. The prime minister cooking chicken pulao for me! Her pulao is really the best I have ever tasted."

Around 8,000 Facebook users liked the photo and over 2,350 shared it as of 1:30am, according to Joy's page.

Joy also mentioned the reasons for celebrating his birthday without festivity. "Today, we are not celebrating [his birthday] publicly for a different reason. Yesterday, [Friday] one of our Member of Parliament Mr Golam Shabur died in a tragic car accident. Our deepest condolence and sympathy to his family. May his soul rest in peace."

He thanked everyone for the birthday wishes. "It is really wonderful to be able to celebrate my birthday surrounded by friends and family in Bangladesh. Kristine and Sophia are here, along with my sister and her clan -- she has four kids. The only ones missing are my aunt and her kids."



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina cooking chicken polau for her son on his 42nd birthday at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

PHOTO SOURCE: FACEBOOK

Elected

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by the ministries. "In fact, the UP chairmen have nothing left to do except to collect revenue and to organise annual development programmes with funds allotted by the government."

Rashid, in this regard, gave an example of the situation by describing how the disaster management ministry had instructed a five-member committee headed by a UNO to carry out rehabilitation works in every affected Upazila in the south after cyclone Mahasen hit the country.

Bupa General Secretary Badiuzzaman Badsha said, "Although UP chairmen are elected by the people, no employees are accountable to the chairmen. Instead all UP employees follow instructions given by district officials." The present parliament passed the law in 2009, but took away power from the UP chairmen. According to the law a UP chairman has to abide by the advice given by MPs, resulting in interference by the lawmakers in local development activities.

Easy, safe also for criminals

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regarding extortion.

For example: PK Banerjee, an abduction victim tortured mercilessly by a criminal gang in Narsingdi on July 6, said his family had to pay gang members a total of Tk 3.05 lakh through bKash in multiple transactions.

It is almost impossible for law enforcers to track down kidnappers and extortionists as they use mobile numbers that have not been registered and fake national ID cards to register with and get mobile financial services. After they are done with their criminal activities, they simply throw away the phones.

The mobile money transfer services were introduced two years ago to get a large number of phone users, who do not have bank accounts, to have some sort of banking services.

People with their phones could transfer money from one mobile to another and agents could help deposit money in their phones.

One can walk into the office of any of the providers with the photocopy of a national ID card or driving

licence or passport and two photographs and get one's phone registered for mobile money transfer services.

If one gives false information or fake documents, there is no way for the service providers to verify those as they do not have access to the national ID card database, said a top official of a mobile financial service provider.

But banks can always verify the addresses of customers and also ensure the identity through an introducer who has an account with the bank. This enables law enforcers to capture financial criminals.

Kidnappers and extortionists use bKash and Dutch-Bangla Bank Limited's mobile money services, the two prominent mobile financial service providers in the country with around 60 lakh account holders, said a high official of Bangladesh Bank.

Abul Kashem Md Shirin, deputy managing director of the Dutch-Bangla Bank Ltd, said as people are transacting without having a bank account, there have been criminal activities.

"We will have to appoint people to verify the account holders' identity to ensure KYC [know your customer] to reduce corruption. We also need access to the NID [national ID card] database."

Kamal S Quadir, Chief Executive Officer of bKash, said, "The security of a mobile financial activity is protected through a combination of the user's PIN and his or her registered SIM [subscriber identification module]."

His company follows the central bank's regulations, he said.

TIM Nurul Kabir, secretary general of Association of Mobile Telecom Operators of Bangladesh, said since the operators did not have online access to the server of the national ID card database, it was not possible for them to verify the authenticity of customer information.

A BTRC official told The Daily Star that a month ago the telecommunications regulator sent a letter to the Election Commission requesting access to the NID server so that operators could verify customers'

information.

The secretary of the Election Commission said they had received the letter and that there was no problem on the part of the commission in sharing the database. He said technical aspects of the sharing were being looked into.

Sources said once the BTRC gets access to the database, carriers will be able to verify the credentials of its customers properly.

Ashim Kumar Dasgupta, an executive director of Bangladesh Bank, said the central bank was going to ban agents from transferring money to other agents so that people without a mobile account could not transfer money.

According to central bank regulations, the agents are responsible for depositing or helping people withdraw money from their own accounts.

Ashim said an account holder would also be limited to sending a certain amount of money and certain numbers of transactions. On an average day, around Tk 125 crore changes hands through mobile banking, he said.

Greens decry

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their recent field visit to the second phase of Purbachal that Rajuk is implementing at Ruppangj of Narayanganj and Kaliganj of Gazipur.

The environmentalists said the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) had set to wipe out existing forestland, homestead, farmland, and wetlands including riverbanks and canals in Parbotha and Borkao moujas of Kaliganj.

Using heavy equipment like dredger, bulldozer and excavator, Rajuk was destroying Shal forests, aged timber trees, fruit-

bearing and medicinal trees, homestead and wetlands to create housing plots by earth filling, said Iqbal Habib, member secretary of the Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, while reading out their findings.

Of the 6,150-acre scheme in the two upazilas, forestland under Kaliganj accounts for 1,600 acres, of which 1,300 acres was to be wiped out, Iqbal said.

The Rajuk action is violating the Supreme Court direction for the conservation of forests, wetlands and orchards, he said.

The consultant hired by the Rajuk had found 43 percent forestland, and 49 percent farmland and homestead in the aforesaid moujas, he said, but Rajuk had proposed to conserve only 6 percent of forest.

"What the Rajuk is doing is a massacre of natural forests, homesteads and wetlands to benefit the society's wealthy section with lucrative housing plots," said Mubasshar Hussain, outgoing president of the Institute of Architects, Bangladesh.

The environmentalists

demanding an impartial investigation into the Rajuk action, and compliance with the Supreme Court directive.

Rajuk chairman Nurul Huda while talking to The Daily Star denied the allegations.

He said they were earth filling only the low-lying and barren lands.

Other organisations that took part in the press conference were Transparency International Bangladesh, Ain O Salish Kendra, Nijera Kori, Poribesh Bachao Andolon, and ALRD.

Tibetan sky burial

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This means they do not see a need to preserve the body, as it is now an empty vessel, so they dispose of it through a sky burial.

In the days leading up to the ceremony monks -- known as lamas -- may chant mantra around the body and burn juniper incense.

The body is then chopped into pieces by

either monks or more commonly, by rogyapas (body-breakers).

Eyewitness accounts suggest the body-breakers do the grim task in high-spirits -- according to Buddhist teaching, this makes it easier for the soul of the deceased to move on.

It is difficult to ascertain the exact process as Tibetans strongly object to visits by the merely curious, but it is

thought the whole body is given to the vultures.

Some stories suggest the body parts are left in the Tower of Silence for a year, exposed to the elements and birds -- men and women are placed in different sections.

Then when only the bones are left, the pieces are broken up with mallets, ground with tsampa (barley flour with tea and yak but-

ter, or milk), and given to the crows and hawks that have waited for the vultures to depart.

The function of the sky burial is simply to dispose of the remains in as generous a way as possible -- this donation of human flesh to the vultures is considered virtuous because it saves the lives of small animals that the vultures might otherwise capture for food.

Mexico jails

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Earlier, officers at the embassy had a meeting with the senior officers of Mexican immigration on July 25.

Mexico detained the 94 illegal immigrants, also including 10 Nepalese, packed into a truck bound for the US border, authorities said on Tuesday.

The migrants were travelling in inhumane conditions. The driver of the vehicle, who was from central Mexico, was arrested on human trafficking charges, reports Reuters.

The truck set out from Huehuetenango, Guatemala, and police detected the migrants with an x-ray at a checkpoint outside Tuxtla Gutierrez after midnight on Monday. The migrants were on their way to the United States, state prosecutors said.

Several of the migrants were treated for hand and leg injuries, and some struggled to breathe due to the "overcrowded conditions" on the truck, Mexico's National Migration Institute said.

"It's a long journey and they intended to travel to the United States like that, literally hidden," said Hector Flores, a spokesman for the Chiapas state prosecutor's office. "Obviously, those are not optimal conditions for human beings."

Between 2007 and 2011, the most recent years for which statistics were available, the number of Indian nationals apprehended by US authorities jumped from less than 1,000 annually to nearly 4,000. The numbers of Bangladeshi, Nepalese and Sri Lankan migrants detained have also increased.

Dhaka's doom

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The capital city's master plan was supposed to be implemented over an area of 1,528 square kilometre with the DAP, which indicates every structure, lake, canal, wetland, retention pond, road, open space and all topographical features, and outlines authorised land use plan.

But the government's compromising stance on enforcing the DAP allows earth filling of reserved wetlands and flood flow zones by powerful real estate developers and illegal building constructions, Jamilur said.

"Real estate developers have filled up nearly 83 percent of designated wetlands and flood flow zones of the capital," he said, adding, "The government appears to have yielded to financial and political power of the real estate developers."

Prof Sarwar Jahan, who teaches urban and regional planning at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology, said consequences of such destruction of flood plains and wetlands

would be water logging, and destruction of ecology, rivers, and wetlands, and food crisis and health hazards.

The DAP has earmarked one-third of the master plan area as flood flow zones, water retention ponds and water bodies.

The salient recommendations in the DAP include reclamation of over 2,500 acres of flood flow zones and agricultural land from the grip of illegal housing schemes, relocation of 3,000 industrial units and scrapping of 16 development projects. None of the recommendations has been fully implemented.

The DAP was finalised and published in the official gazette in June 2010, but its implementation was soon made subject to a "final" review by a seven-member committee in the face of fierce opposition from real estate developers and Dhaka lawmakers.

Rajuk Chairman Md Nurul Huda said, "We could not implement major DAP recommendations, as the seven-

member cabinet committee did not give any directives."

Rajuk is now working on preparing another DAP, as the existing one expires its 20-year timeline in 2015.

"Many vital planning provisions incorporated in the present DAP are feared to be scrapped in the new plan," said the Rajuk chief.

Khondker Shawkat Hossain, secretary to the housing ministry, said, "We will conservatively reconsider turning cropland into settlements, as change in land use becomes unavoidable over time."

Syeda Rizwana Hasan, chief executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, said the government move for a new DAP was an attempt to legalise earth filling of vast tracts of wetland that were vital for environment conservation and liveability.

"It's an attempt by the government towards the end of its tenure to have negotiations with the unscrupulous realtors to reap undue gains before the general election," she observed.

Chef 'too fat' to live in NZ

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renewed with "very little problem", his wife said.

"We applied year after year and there were no issues," she said.

"They never mentioned Albert's weight or his health once and he was a lot heavier then."

But in early May, the couple was told their work visas had been declined because of

Mr Buitenhuis's weight.

"The irony is that at the moment he weighs less than when we first arrived in New Zealand and also less than in his first medical, which was accepted by [immigration authorities]," his wife said.

The couple has appealed to New Zealand's immigration minister, citing the chef's recent weight loss.

An immigration spokes-

man said Mr Buitenhuis's application had been rejected because his obesity put him at "significant risk" of complications including diabetes, hypertension and heart disease.

"It is important that all migrants have an acceptable standard of health to minimise costs and demands on New Zealand's health services," he said.

Joy wants Harvard guy to run publicity

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"For example, if a constituency needs something special like a bridge or a road, the campaign will be focused on it in that constituency," said a lawmaker.

The constituency-based campaign would work more than the centralised campaign, said the lawmaker asking not to be identified.

As part of the party's initial

plan, AL would go for a massive publicity campaign immediately after the Eid-ul-Fitr. The prime focus of the campaign would be countering what the AL insiders say is BNP-Jamaat-Hefajat's anti-government propaganda and religion issues.

At the same time, the party would train its focus on terrorist and militant activities occurred during the last

BNP-Jamaat rule and the incumbent government's development activities.

The insiders say AL also plans to engage theology scholars to remove confusion over religion-based propaganda. The party might also bring several small Islamist parties in the fold of the grand alliance ahead of the next polls, they add.

The lawmakers who have

met Joy requested him to tell the prime minister to change policy in some cases to increase public confidence in the party, the insiders further say. Joy assured them of conveying the message to his mother, also the chief of AL.

Contacted, a number of AL leaders said it was too early to comment on the campaign strategies.