

# Engage further with Myanmar to resolve Rohingya issue

Dhaka to int'l community

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday called on the international community to increase engagement with Myanmar for resolving the citizenship issue of Rohingyas.

It also stressed enhancing economic activities and creating employment opportunities in Myanmar's Arakan province in efforts to deter the Rohingyas from crossing over to Bangladesh.

The call came at a diplomatic briefing at the foreign ministry on strategy papers with regard to Myanmar nationals in Bangladesh.

On September 9 last year, the cabinet approved the National Strategic Paper in a bid to identify, locate and deport undocumented Myanmar citizens from Bangladesh.

To execute the plan, two bodies -- National Coordination Committee and National Taskforce -- will be formed under the foreign ministry. The foreign minister and the foreign secretary will head the two bodies.

Briefing the diplomats, Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque said Bangladesh sincerely wants to maintain good relations with Myanmar and wants to increase engage-

ment with the neighbouring country.

Meeting sources said foreign diplomats suggested the government create a relationship of confidence and trust with Myanmar so that it never considers Bangladesh as a threat.

Rohingyas, minority Muslim population in Myanmar, have remained "stateless" for the last several decades as Myanmar's 1982 Citizenship Act undid the status of legally granted citizenship in 1948.

State-sponsored persecutions prompted several hundred thousands of Rohingyas from the Rakhine state to flee to Bangladesh in 1978 and 1991. Bangladesh arranged temporary shelters on both the occasions on humanitarian grounds, but the crisis has continued.

In June 2012, as sectarian violence between the Buddhist Rakhine and Muslims flared up in Myanmar, the international community asked Bangladesh to open its border for the Rohingyas instead of pressuring Myanmar to solve the problem internally.

At yesterday's meeting, ambassadors/high commissioners of the US, European Union, Canada, Malaysia, China and Australia, and representatives from UN organisations including UNDP and UNHCR were present.



PHOTO: BSS

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hands over Bangabandhu Fellowship, National Science and Technology Fellowship and grants to students and researchers at the Osmani Memorial Auditorium in the capital yesterday.

## Twin fetuses removed from baby boy

*Life-saving operation at BSMMU*

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A team of doctors at BSMMU yesterday saved the life of a six-month-old boy after successfully removing twin fetuses -- a very rare condition known as Fetus-in-Fetu.

"It was a very difficult surgery but we did it. We had to be very careful while removing twin fetuses from the boy's body," said Prof Shafiqul Haque who led the nine-member team of paediatric surgeons.

The three-hour operation on Soheb began at 9:00am, he said, adding: "Soheb is now in good health and the surgery won't create any obstruction to his growth."

There were over hundred cases of Fetus-in-Fetu in babies worldwide, but those fetuses were not twins.

Only three or four cases of twin fetuses in babies exist in medical history, said Prof Shafiqul, who also led a surgery in separating conjoined twins -- Barsha and Bonnya -- in 2009.

The twin fetuses weighing over two kilograms existed between the abdomen and liver of Soheb and they were connected to various veins, he told The Daily Star.

Lutfunnahar, the baby's mother, said she became very upset after knowing about the presence of twin fetuses in Soheb from an ultrasound during pregnancy.

"I am very happy after the successful operation and grateful to the doctors," she added.

The parents had admitted Soheb at Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU) on January 25, according to a press release of BSMMU.

## Bus gets onto footpath, kills man in Savar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A pedestrian was killed as a passenger bus veered off the road and ran him over on a footpath on Dhaka-Aricha highway at Ulail Bazar in Savar early today.

The dead is Mohammad Mofiz, 28, an auto-rickshaw driver from Genda in Savar.

All the passengers of the bus, however, escaped unhurt.

Rafiqul Islam, sub-inspector of Savar Police Station, said the driver of the Savar-bound Shyamoli Paribahan bus lost control over steering and climbed onto the footpath around 12:15am.

Mofiz died on the spot, he added.

Harun, a shopkeeper at Ulail Bazar, said he first heard a loud bang from his house nearby and then he saw the bus ploughing through a market by the footpath. All the shops of the market were closed at the time of the accident.

Police rushed to the spot and seized the bus, but the driver managed to flee by the time.

## Turkey election candidate slain

AFP, Istanbul

A ruling party candidate in Turkish local elections next month has been killed in an armed attack in Istanbul, media reported yesterday.

The attack took place Wednesday night outside the offices of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Istanbul's populous Beylikdüzü district, Dogan news agency reported.

## Valentine's

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Valentine's night showing of "Beijing Love Story" at a movie theatre in the city's Xintiandi shopping complex.

A graphic published by the paper shows how the group accomplished their mission, with every other ticket successfully purchased by the singles so that no two adjacent seats are available.

"Want to see a movie on Valentine's Day?" reads an online message by the stunt organiser, known by the initials UP, according to the newspaper.

"Sorry, you'll have to sit separately. Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Give us singles a chance."

The user described himself as a computer nerd who broke up with his girlfriend last year.

## Recruit 200 factory inspectors

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on grounds of poor labour rights and workplace safety.

Chiefs of the European Union, Dutch, Canadian and German missions were also present at the meeting at the foreign ministry office, where they discussed the whole range of issues including the appointment of 200 factory inspectors, labour rights and freedom of association.

"I am encouraged by the progress, but a lot still needs to be done to regain the GSP," Mozena said, while reiterating the need to strictly adhere to the action plan to win back trade benefits to the US market.

The US ambassador said a "good roadmap" has been laid out for additional progress in the weeks ahead. "I am encouraged that all the focus is on the March deadline and having these different elements set in place."

William Hanna, head of the EU delegation to Bangladesh, specifi-

cally brought up the issue of the publicly accessible database or matrix of all garment factories, in which information relating to labour and fire and building inspections could be found.

Such a mechanism is yet to be put in place by the government. "The transparent database is key in the Sustainability Compact, so a lot more needs to be done," he added.

Bangladesh signed the Sustainability Compact with the EU involving the International Labour Organisation on July 8, where it committed to improve labour, health and safety conditions for workers by June 2014.

Heather Cruden, Canadian high commissioner to Bangladesh, too emphasised on the need to demonstrate some headway in the action plan by the anniversary of the Rana Plaza building collapse, as the international community would be looking in "very closely".

"There would be lots of press,

lots of visitors from countries who are buying garments from Bangladesh, and they want to see progress in the areas of labour standards, fire safety, building safety, labour court and union.

"So, there are lots of work that needs to be done between now and then to meet the commitments that had been outlined in the Sustainability Compact and other documents," she added.

Mikail Shipar, labour and employment secretary, said he is "hopeful" of recruiting the 200 factory inspectors by the March deadline as the public service commission has "assured" him.

A total of 288 inspectors would be enlisted from the BCS waiting list, according to the labour secretary.

He said a progress report on the action plan would be submitted to the United States of Trade Representative, the chief trade negotiation body for the Obama Administration, by April 15.

## Start 'genuine'

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She further said her country was concerned that many Bangladeshis did not get the opportunity to vote and more than half the seats in parliament were filled by acclamation.

"Nevertheless, although we do not consider the election to have been fully participatory, we will continue to support the people of Bangladesh by working with the government, opposition parties, civil society and the private sector," the high commissioner added.

Noting that BNP had stopped imposing hartals at this moment, she said Canada hoped that this would encourage a genuine and constructive dialogue between the political parties.

"Canada considers fully participatory elections, in addition to allowing space for legitimate political dissent, as fundamental to a vibrant democracy."

The high commissioner said her country was concerned about the allegations of forced disappearances, arbitrary arrest and ongoing detention of the BNP men.

"We call on the Government of Bangladesh to respect its international human rights obligations, including the protection of religious freedom," she added.

## BCL asks Selim

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They laid siege to administrative building of the university around 1:30pm, and submitted a memorandum to the authorities.

They would also submit memoranda to home and land ministers on Sunday for recovering the dormitory, the protesters added.

"We have given 15 days to the university authorities. If we do not see any development by this time, we will go for tougher movement including abstention from classes and exams, peaceful road blocking," said the BCL leader.

JNUL Vice Chancellor Dr Mizanur Rahman said they would contact the land ministry and other authorities concerned soon to get back the dormitory.

## EU urges crisis-hit Ukraine to adopt 'urgent' reforms

AFP, Kiev

EU Enlargement Commissioner Stefan Fuele yesterday called on Ukraine to take "urgent steps" to form a new government and reform the constitution, key opposition demands in the crisis-hit country.

Fuele arrived in Kiev on Tuesday for talks with President Viktor Yanukovich, opposition leaders and members of civil society, in a bid to help defuse the nearly three-month-long standoff between authorities and anti-government protesters.

"I stressed the need to take urgent steps on constitutional reform and the formation of a new inclusive government," he told reporters in the Ukrainian capital.

The protest movement erupted in

November when Yanukovich rejected a key EU trade and political pact in favour of closer ties with Russia, turning Kiev's central Independence Square into a war zone-like, barricaded tent city, and spreading to other regions.

After initially ignoring opposition demands, Yanukovich yielded some ground after protests turned deadly in January, dismissing the government.

Yanukovich has also hinted that he was ready to sign off on constitutional changes slowly making their way through parliament that would strip the president of some of his powers.

But he has refused to move forward next year's presidential elections -- a key opposition demand.

Aside from its domestic resonance,

the protest movement has also become a wider tussle between Russia and the West over the future of ex-Soviet Ukraine.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov yesterday blasted Western states for meddling in the nation of 46 million, saying that Europe's relations with Moscow were facing a "moment of truth" over the crisis.

"Attempts to decide for the citizens of Ukraine what the future of their state should be and even who should be in their government appear doomed," Russia's top diplomat wrote in Moscow's Kommersant daily.

Fuele made no mention of Lavrov's comments, but said his main message was "that the only one plan which can work here on the ground is a Ukrainian plan."

The European Union has said it

stands ready to extend conditional financial assistance to Ukraine in cooperation with the International Monetary Fund and other global actors.

"There are conditions and they are very transparent: reforms, reforms, reforms," Fuele said yesterday, refusing to give a figure for any future financial assistance.

The European Union had last year said it was ready to provide Kiev with a 610-million-euro (\$825-million) loan were it to adopt a comprehensive economic restructuring package prescribed by the IMF.

Shortly after Yanukovich ditched the EU pact, Moscow promised Kiev a \$15-billion bailout that included a crucial rebate for Ukrainian natural gas imports from Russia.

## Blood money can save 3

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staying illegally in the UAE that time, in the name of collecting legal work permits for them. But he neither did the task nor returned the money to the trio. Enraged, they attacked him, Mizanur mentioned.

In 2009, the lower court of Sharjah sentenced the three to death for killing the Indian citizen. The case then went to Sharjah appeal court that also upheld the lower court's verdict in 2011.

## Saudi restriction

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to Bangladeshis for years.

In the same year, the oil-rich country also squeezed the recruitment of Bangladeshi workers. Saudi Arabia now employs around 12 lakh Bangladeshis.

The reasons for the restriction were not known officially. But unofficial sources said it was for various irregularities involving the recruitment process, which the Saudi authorities wanted to discipline.

In a statement yesterday, Expatriates Welfare and Overseas Employment Minister Khandker Mosharraf Hossain said, "It's a green signal to Bangladesh that Saudi Arabia would recruit workers from

Bangladesh on a regular basis soon."

"This opportunity has come as a blessing for Bangladeshi workers as they have been waiting to get back their right to change job," Mosharraf Hossain, labour counselor at the Bangladeshi Consulate in Jeddah, told The Daily Star over the phone.

In April last year, the KSA had declared a general amnesty for undocumented expatriates and asked them to legalise their status or return home without facing any penalty.

Around eight lakh Bangladeshis took advantage of the amnesty, which ended on November 4 last year, and regularised their status, while some 30,000 returned home.

## Who?

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The programme was organised by the Society for the Welfare of the Intellectually Disabled, Bangladesh (Swid) on the occasion of its annual sports programme. Swid is a local NGO working with physically and mentally challenged children since 1977.

Yesterday, as its officials praised the minister and other government officials for their support and boasted about their various successes, some of the kids engaged in bickering, seemingly oblivious to what was happening on the stage.

Such behaviour by top government officials and NGO workers is in stark contrast to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's care for the children and with special needs.

And Hasina's daughter Saima Wazed Putul champions the rights of children needing special attention. She is a member of the National Association of School Psychologists in America and is also involved with Autism Speaks, a research organisation.

Asked to comment, Nafees Rahman, director of the National Forum of Organisations Working with the Disabled, said, "This is a clear lack of commonsense by the organisers and it makes you ask yourself how much of it is for the children and how much of it is for gratification of the speakers."

Muntasir Maruf, a doctor at the National Mental Hospital, said it was impossible for children with special needs to grasp such long speeches. "They respond well to other forms of communications like audio and visuals."

An expert at Bangladesh Protibondhi Foundation said the government high-ups in the sector demonstrated a "shocking lack of understanding" about these children.

"These children develop muscle spasms if made to stay still for too long. They also do not have the capacity to react. So, if they are made to sit, they will do so until allowed to get up regardless of the discomfort they

might be going through," the expert told The Daily Star last night, requesting anonymity.

Contested, Swid Director Nurul Islam, who himself spoke at the programme, said they went too far in this regard and that they would be careful about this in future.