

TEESTA, LAND DEALS

Dhaka to seek timeframe from Delhi

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka will press hard for the much-awaited Teesta water-sharing deal and ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) at the third meeting of the India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission (JCC) to be held on September 20 in India. Diplomatic sources said Dhaka will seek "specific timeframe" from New Delhi this time to conclude the two issues.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali will lead a high-profile 15-member delegation, including eight secretaries of the government such as principal secretary to the prime minister, secretaries of the ministries of foreign, home, commerce and shipping to the meeting.

Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who invited Ali to attend the meeting, will lead the Indian side. The Bangladesh delegation will be visiting on September 18-21.

This will be Ali's maiden visit to India since becoming the foreign minister and he will also pay courtesy calls on the Indian President Pranab Mukherjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and meet other Indian dignitaries during the visit.

Both Dhaka and New Delhi consider the meeting as significant, as a wide range of issues like trade, connectivity, power, water resources, security, border management, introduction of coastal shipping, infrastructure, people to people contacts, culture, environment and education will be discussed.

The killing of Bangladeshi citizens along the border will also be high on the agenda at the meeting between the two foreign ministers, said foreign ministry officials.

Bangladesh will urge the Indian border security force to stop killing Bangladeshis. "It must be stopped at any cost, otherwise it will not be easy to improve the relations," said an official at the foreign ministry.

The JCC will review the progress of cooperation in important areas like security, trade and connectivity, water resources and power sector.

Bangladesh would ask for import of 100 MW electricity from Palatana plant in Tripura and another 500 MW in addition to the present 500 MW, said officials.

Officials said Bangladesh delegation will discuss enhancing its export to India and raise the issue of certain para-tariff and non-tariff barriers that lie in the way of increased exports to India.

He said the Bangladesh side

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PHOTO: STAR

Chemicals being sprayed in a pineapple orchard in Jangalia of Madhupur in Tangail.

Cold chains can save food supply chain

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chain, mostly due to the existence of an effective cold chain from harvesting products to sale to the end consumer," he told The Daily Star.

The most effective way of preserving and keeping food items fresh after harvest is to store those in suitable temperatures, he said.

This will normally mean storing at much cooler temperatures, in some cases down to 0°C or close to 0°C, for example, for fish products. Some fruits and vegetables can be preserved for several months at cool temperatures, he added.

"Freezing products straight after harvest is also a common method used around the world mostly for highly perishable products [fish, meat and some vegetables]. This provides a very long shelf life, but it requires an effective cold chain infrastructure," said John.

Preservation also includes drying of the food items after harvest, which is very effective in maintaining long shelf life. Another method is canning, a system that has been in place for over 200 years.

The US, Canada, Japan and the European countries have built hundreds of cold chain units -- from storage to trucks and trains. These trucks and trains transport perishable food and temperature-sensitive chemicals

to protect them from bacterial infections.

Nazma Shaheen, professor of nutrition and food science at Dhaka University, said developed nations use green and advanced technologies to keep their food safe.

"Monitoring system is very strong in Japan and the US, where research organisations and universities are tagged in carrying out quality checks of food items," Nazma said.

She said Bangladesh started using formalin 10-12 years ago when fish began to be imported from Myanmar. Initially, the use of formalin on fish was very limited, but it became rampant when businessmen saw it could stop fish from rotting for days.

Later, Bangladesh learnt using other preservatives in fruits and vegetables from India, she added. "Carrying goods in cold containers or temperature-controlled containers could save us."

According to Shankar Roy, head of operations of Solargaon, a firm that is now setting up a solar mini-grid, the country can easily install cold storage facilities. As for the power shortage, he said renewable energy can solve this particular problem.

Quoting a study report, he said a 1,000-cubic metre cold storage, which can store about 250 tonnes of fruits and vegetables, can be built for Tk 2.5

crore. A similar size storage facility for fish would cost about Tk 3.5 crore. A 50,000-litre storage for milk can be set up for Tk 1.5 to Tk 2 crore.

China can be a role model in this regard. In 2010, its government took measures to ensure safe food in its 261 counties of 27 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities. Under the system, the government has built hundreds of cold storage facilities at rural marketplaces where farmers can keep their produce.

Done under the framework of a regional management system, China has brought into full play the local government, industry groups, enterprises, farmers, consumers and the media. It has also eliminated hidden risks in the food supply chain by monitoring all the way from production to sale.

Besides establishing cold chains, the government's policies and monitoring are very essential for ensuring safe food.

The US has federal and state standards for food safety. The country has accredited a third party to conduct food safety audits and to issue certificates to importers.

Japan and Australia also have very strict food safety rules like the US. These countries have a list of pesticides, food additives, colour additives, flavours and deleterious substances,

which are banned for use in food. Their monitoring is so strong that no one dares to use any kind of harmful substances.

"Many universities and research firms are directly linked to the production level where they can examine the quality of the produce in those countries," said Prof Nazma.

In Australia, the government maintains food safety through monitoring at three levels -- federal government, state government and local government bodies. Commercial farming, cooking and sales of food items require licences and the licences would be cancelled in case of any breach of rules or use of unauthorised additives, pesticides, colours and flavours.

"There are many laboratories across Australia to test food at farms and restaurants. Local government bodies are so strong that they can raid any farm or restaurant at any time for test," said Imtiaz Kais Risha, a Bangladeshi environment scientist in Australia.

According to him, Bangladesh needs to set up laboratories to frequently test the quality of foods at the farm level. He suggested the government strengthen local government, such as union and upazila parishads, to do the job.

Graft accused

MP Bodi hits out at ACC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cig

Awami League lawmaker Abdur Rahman Bodi yesterday said he would reveal "all secrets" of the Anti-Corruption Commission and its Chairman Mohammad Badiuzzaman if they tried to prove him corrupt.

"I am requesting at this meeting.... respected Mr Badiuzzaman, the ACC chairman, your name is Bodi while mine is Bodi too. If one Bodi wants to drive out another Bodi, every secret will be disclosed," the lawmaker said while addressing a discussion organised to mark the National Income Tax Day in Chittagong.

The MP from Teknaf and Ukhiya constituencies was sued by ACC in August allegedly for concealing information in his wealth statement and amassing wealth beyond his known sources of income.

He yesterday said he would resign if anybody could prove his involvement in corruption.

Asked about the remarks, the ACC chief last night said, "We will look into his [Bodi's] speech and make a decision afterwards."

The lawmaker's speech will no way influence the ACC investigation into

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Booters beat

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from skipper Mamunul Islam -- a powerful left-footed drive from the edge of the box -- ensured Bangladesh their third win in the Asian Games; their first since 1986 when they beat.

Afghanistan, ranked 41 places above Bangladesh in the latest FIFA rankings and boasting a number of players who ply their trade in Europe, dominated the match both in terms of possessions and creating opportunities, but it was the defensive display of Bangladesh, coupled with an excellent performance from goalkeeper Rasel Mahmud Liton, that kept them in the game.

And when an opportunity came knocking in the shape of a counter-attack in the 83rd minute, Mamunul's sharpshooting made sure that Bangladesh got an Asian Games win under their belt after a long gap of 28 years.

Bangladesh could have left the field with a bigger margin of victory had Jamal Bhuiyan's effort in the dying moments from the half-way line not drifted wide off the target. But even a 1-0 win would give Bangladesh a shot in the arm before they take on group favourites Uzbekistan on September 18 and Hong Kong on September 22. Two teams from each of the eight groups will qualify for the second round; a stage Bangladesh have never managed to reach.

Bus tickets of early

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As a result, many failed to get the tickets for the days they had planned to travel, evening after standing in long queues at different bus terminals for hours.

The holidaymakers had no other option but to buy tickets for the alternative days. They claimed they go through the same situation almost every year.

"I had to buy four tickets to Rangpur for October 1," Golam Mortuza, who wanted to travel the next day, told the Daily Star at the Shyamoli bus terminal yesterday.

The bus operators said the demand for tickets for October 2-5 was high yesterday, leading to the crisis.

The homegoers are likely to get a five-day holiday, starting from October 3, for the two upcoming festivals.

Many ticket-seekers alleged the bus operators were selling only the tickets of the back-row seats as the front ones were being kept for the VIPs.

"I was the fourth person in my queue. When my turn came around

8:30am, the counter staff told me no middle or front row seat was not available," said Abdul Alim, a Thakurgaon-bound passenger, at the Gabtoli bus counter of Hanif Paribahan.

He said he had to buy two back-row seats for October 3 later.

The SR Paribhahan's Gabtoli counter staff suddenly stopped selling advance bus tickets yesterday afternoon.

They returned after two and a half hours around 4:30pm only to resume the ticket sale for an hour.

Bangladesh Bus-Truck Owners' Association President Faruk Talukder Soheli said thousands of people leave the capital together on three or four particular days ahead of the festivals, leading to the ticket crisis.

"If the passengers decide to travel on different days, the problem can be resolved to a great extent," he said adding the number of transport is currently not enough to meet the Eid demand.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Railway will start selling the advance train tickets from September 26.

Tribunal accepts charges against 3

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arguments from both prosecution and defence on charge framing.

The trio joined the Razakar Bahini - an auxiliary force of the Pakistani occupation army - in 1971 and committed killing, mass killing, rape, looting, arson and forced conversion, according to the prosecution.

Sirajul, who according to the prosecution was the most notorious among the three, did not appoint any lawyer.

The tribunal yesterday appointed a state defence lawyer Mohammad Abul Hasan for Sirajul.

Abdul Latif filed a bail petition which the tribunal yesterday rejected.

Prosecutor Syed Sayedul Haque Suman read out the charges before the three-member tribunal led by Justice M Enayetur Rahim.

Among the eight charges, four have been brought against Sirajul alone for killing about 666 people, two against all of them for the killing of 47 people and two against Khan Akram and Abdul Latif for converting 200 Hindus

and killing a person.

According to the prosecution, Sirajul on May 13, 1971 was involved in the killing of 40 to 50 people of Hindu Community at Ranjitpur in the district. Their houses were also plundered.

On May 21, 1971, an armed group killed around 600 to 700 Hindus when several thousand Hindu men gathered at Kalimandir in Dakra of Rampal of the district in order to go to refugee camps in India.

Nineteen civilians of Besorgati and Kandapara under Bagerhat Sadar Police Station were detained, tortured and killed on June 18, 1971. Sirajul is found to have been involved in the killings, said Sayedul Haque.

Hasan's case

The tribunal yesterday appointed state defence lawyer Abdus Sukur Khan in another war crimes case for fugitive Syed Md Hasan Ali.

On August 24, the tribunal accepted six charges on crimes against humanity in 1971 against Hasan.

The six charges include setting fire and looting seven houses of one Hasan Ahmed of Sachail village on April 27; involvement in killing of one Tofazzal, abduction of two other people and setting fire to two houses of Konabahal village on August 23 and involvement in killing 12 persons and torching 10 houses in Shimulhati village on September 9.

Other charges include involvement in killing eight people and abduction of 10 others in Borgaon village on September 27; involvement in abducting and later killing Kamini Kumar Ghosh and Jibon Chakravarty and looting Ghosh's house in Araiura village on October 8 and involvement in killing Rashid Ali Bepari and setting fire to 100 houses in Sachail village on December 11.

According to the formal charges, Hassan, 65, alleged commander of Tarail unit of Razakar Bahini in Kishoreganj, set up a camp of the auxiliary force of the Pakistani occupation army at Tarail Police Station on April

23, 1971.

Jabbar's case

Meanwhile, the third prosecution witness in the war crimes case against fugitive Abdul Jabbar, former Jatiya Party lawmaker, gave almost a similar testimony as the other witnesses.

Abdul Maker, 75, said on May 16, 1971, Jabbar attended a rally on the playground of Tushkhali High School. At the rally Jabbar issued a command to bring in two freedom fighters Abdur Razzak and Motleb Sharif dead or alive.

Following his order, armed Razakars killed the two freedom fighters.

Earlier witnesses had said Jabbar forcefully converted more than 150 people from the Hindu community to Islam and looted about 360 houses in Phuljhuri village.

Jabbar is facing five charges for his alleged involvement in crimes against humanity during the liberation war in 1971.

Solution simple

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through three types of reactions: chemical, bacterial and enzyme. Two methods can be applied to prevent this change. First, we can dry up the fruits or vegetables or, second, we can keep them in the cold.

To keep them at low temperature, the products have to be preserved in cold storage from the stage of their production.

Some small cold storages are now available in China, which are very cost-effective and modular. Parts of them can be assembled anywhere.

If the government sets up two such cold storages -- one for fish and meat and the other for vegetables -- at each small market the traders will not need to use formalin.

The setting up of two such cold storages at small markets might cost around Tk 30 lakh. In total, Tk 15 crore

will be required to set up 100 cold storages in around 50 markets in Dhaka city. Half of the problems caused by the use of formalin in the capital may be solved at a cost of only Tk 15 crore!

Such cold storages will have to be set up in the wholesale markets to get rid of the remaining half of the problem. It may cost another Tk 50 crore, which will solve the problem stemming from the abuse of formalin in Dhaka city.

Traders use formalin to extend the life of fresh foods. If the perishable products get completely rotten the traders will lose their whole capital. But those who trade in fresh food are mostly small traders. It is not possible for them to set up two cold storages at a cost of Tk 30 lakh near their markets. If the government sets them up with technology, they can buy the service.

But the government, its advisers or the administration are not taking this simple step.

There are movements against the use of formalin. The local media are providing extensive coverage about the dangers of formalin use. Laws have been enacted, traders arrested and seminars held. But the government is nowhere close to the action that must be carried out.

One thing has to be clear: the problem of fresh food is not unique in Bangladesh. It is a global phenomenon. Almost all countries are facing it.

But Bangladesh will not invest crores of taka to invent the solution to the problem, as technology has already been developed and standardised throughout the world.

The solution will be clearer if we look at the examples from different developed countries as to how they

have solved the problem.

Bangladesh can also solve the problem through using the same method. Fresh laws need not be enacted. We will just have to do the work that is necessary. We will have to set up cold chains to preserve fresh food in Bangladesh.

It is high time to take some action for real improvement in the scene.

We can also look at other areas for further improvement.

In Japan, where I now live, licences must be taken for commercial farming of all perishable foods and vegetables.

In the application, the licencees have to clearly mention the type of chemicals and pesticides they are going to use.

(The writer is a non-resident Bangladeshi and has been living in Japan for more than 20 years.)

277 illegal structures

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and Railway Nirapatta Bahini (RNB) joined the drive in the wake of a clash between slum dwellers and law enforcers during the eviction the day before.

Slum dwellers in the station area were seen taking away their belongings to evacuate the shanties, but the drive team did not touch their shacks like the previous days due to a High Court ban.

The drive will be continued until lands adjacent to rail tracks in the capital and Narayanganj are freed from grabbers, said Nurunnabi Kabir, divisional estate officer of Bangladesh Railway.

"We have a plan to deploy Ansar members to bar grabbers from re-occupying the land," he said.

However, visiting the area just two hours after the drive, the Daily Star correspondent saw some traders of

the kitchen market set up their shops on and by the rail tracks.

Many evicted in the last three days from Khilgaon to Tejgaon Railway Station have already begun their business activities in their makeshift shops.

Abul Kashem, a trader of Nakhal Para kitchen market, told The Daily Star that the market opens around 4:00pm and the shop was his only means of livelihood.

"I cannot keep shut my shop even for a day. The government has to rehabilitate traders before evicting them," he said.

Abdul Majid, officer-in-charge of Dhaka Railway Police Station, however, said the authorities would form a team comprising railway officials, railway police and RNB members to make sure that no one could occupy rail tracks or areas adjacent to them.