

Send back killer of Bangabandhu

Dhaka reiterates call to Washington

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka yesterday reiterated its call to Washington for immediate repatriation of a self-confessed killer of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and another convicted war criminal.

It also called for signing a bilateral extradition treaty agreeing to deport wanted criminals in each other's captivity.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam made the call when newly appointed US Ambassador in Dhaka Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat met him at the foreign ministry.

Meeting sources said Shahriar prominently discussed the issue of sending back Rashed Chowdhury, the self-confessed killer of Bangabandhu, and Ashrafuzzaman Khan, a convicted war

criminal.

After an hour-long meeting, Bernicat told reporters that the relations between the US and Bangladesh are so broad that there are lot of things to talk about.

"We had a very useful conversation," she said. The US envoy, however, did not take any question but hoped that she would meet the press soon.

At the meeting, Shahriar and Bernicat also discussed the current political situation and violence across the country, meeting sources said.

A foreign ministry press release said the US envoy highly appreciated Bangladesh's tremendous advancement in the socioeconomic area.

She expected that the relations between the two countries would be strengthened further.

Bob Dylan takes on critics

BBC ONLINE

Bob Dylan has turned the tables on his critics during a 30-minute speech, at a charity gala honouring his career.

The 73-year-old, who rarely talks about his work, asked why critics complain he "can't sing" and sounds "like a frog" but do not "say that about Tom Waits?"

"Critics say my voice is shot, that I have no voice. Why don't they say those things about Leonard Cohen? Why do I get special treatment?" he continued.

The event was to mark charity Musicares naming Dylan their person

of the year.

Artists including Tom Jones, Jack White, Beck, Sheryl Crow and Crosby, Stills and Nash performed covers of Dylan's work at the pre-Grammys event in Los Angeles on Friday night.

Dylan did not perform, but instead appeared on stage with a pile of loose papers, which he referred to saying: "I'm going to read some of this."

After a standing ovation, Dylan said: "Critics say I can't carry a tune and I talk my way through a song. Really? I've never heard that said about Lou Reed. Why does he get to go scot-free?" he asked.



FUNNYpics

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

A dog sitting at the back of a bicycle at Suhrawardy Udyan. The bike has a customised carrier for the pet so that it can sit relaxed. However, the dog still has to be careful so its tail does not get tangled in the spokes of the rear wheel.



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Saudi jobs up for gentle workers

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process," Khandker Md Iftekh Haider, secretary of the Bangladesh expatriates' welfare ministry, told The Daily Star last night.

Dhaka has welcomed the move and said it would help Bangladesh to send more trained and qualified workforce to the Kingdom.

Khandker Mosharraf Hossain, minister for expatriates' welfare and overseas employment, said Bangladesh was ready to send 10,000 qualified workers to Saudi Arabia every month once the two countries sealed the deal.

He also said the Saudi employers would bear the entire migration cost, including that for air fare, levy and visa.

Presently, most of the country's remittance comes from Saudi Arabia, home to more than 15 lakh Bangladeshis. In 2013-2014, Bangladeshi workers in the KSA sent \$3.12 billion in remittance to the country.

Bangladesh can earn \$1.5 billion more a year if it can send another 10 lakh workers.

"We understand that Bangladesh can supply trained and qualified labor at a cheaper rate," a Saudi diplomat in Dhaka told this newspaper.

He added Bangladesh pledged not to send people with criminal backgrounds.

Riyadh asked the Saudi Embassy in Dhaka to keep a watch on the measures taken by the Bangladesh government to this effect, he said.

The Saudi government laid utmost importance on recruitment of clean people following reports of Rohingyas being involved in criminal activities in the KSA.

Over 1.5 million Bangladeshis currently work in Saudi Arabia

Dhaka can supply 1.3 million qualified labour at cheaper rates

Private agencies to remain in the recruitment procedure

Bangladesh to ensure good conduct of its workers

Saudi to ensure favourable work condition

KSA used to recruit 150,000 Bangladeshis a year before 2008

According to the Saudi government, around 200,000 Myanmar nationals entered into the KSA with Bangladesh passports over the past 20 years.

Over the years, the Saudi authorities have been asking Dhaka to renew their documents. But Dhaka denied it, saying they were not Bangladeshis. This enraged the Saudi government.

In 2013, Dhaka also turned down a Saudi request to bring back 378 Rohingyas, identified as notorious criminals and put in jail on various charges.

The Saudi government claimed that these Rohingyas had Bangladesh passports.

Following a negotiation, Dhaka in 2013 agreed to issue special documents to Rohingya Muslims, but has yet to issue any such paper.

Following all this, the KSA is now very strict about recruiting Bangladeshi workers.

Al Fahaid, the Saudi minister, who is leading a 19-member delegation, had an extensive meeting with a 10-member Bangladesh delegation led by the expatriates' welfare ministry secretary.

Later in the afternoon, the Saudi team also held talks with members of Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies (Baira), a platform of private recruiting agencies, at a city hotel.

Bangladesh expatriates' welfare minister said the Saudi government would hire workers under 10 categories, including maids, housekeepers and drivers.

Asked about the cost, he said, "Governments of both countries agreed that the migration cost would be very nominal... I think the cost will not exceed Tk 15,000 to 20,000 per worker."

He added the recruitment would be done through private agencies under close government supervisions to avoid any untoward incident.

However, he said the government would not set any service fee for the recruiting agencies.

Contacted, Shahidul Islam, the outgoing Bangladesh ambassador to Saudi, said the minimum salary of a worker would not be less than SR 1,000 (about Tk 21,000).

"A Bangladeshi can earn Saudi Riyal 2,000 to 2,500 a month, including overtime bills," he told The Daily Star over the phone.

But the minister said they were still negotiating to secure a better deal that would ensure higher pay and improved working conditions.

On February 1, the Saudi government announced that it would hire workers from Bangladesh again, after a six-year ban since 2008 over anomalies in recruitment process.

Extremists may gain

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As political battle lines become ever more entrenched, the opportunities for political reconciliation are fast diminishing, according to a report released yesterday by the non-profit organisation that seeks to prevent or resolve deadly conflicts.

A protracted and violent political crisis would leave Sheikh Hasina and Khaleda Zia the ultimate losers, particularly if a major breakdown of law and order were to encourage the military to intervene, it says.

"Though there is as yet no sign of that, history suggests it is an eventuality not to be dismissed."

It fears extremists and criminal networks could exploit the resulting political void with the two largest mainstream parties unwilling to work towards a new political compact that respects the rights of both opposition and victor to govern within the rule of law.

"Violent Islamist factions are

already reviving, threatening the secular, democratic order," it says.

The Group felt that both parties would be best served by changing course: the AL government by respecting the democratic right to dissent; the BNP by reviving its political fortunes through compromise with the ruling party, rather than violent street politics.

The report mentions the AL and its leader Sheikh Hasina emphasise that the absence of former premier Khaleda Zia and her party from parliament makes them "political non-entities". Yet, concerned about a comeback, the government is attempting to forcibly neutralise the political opposition and stifle dissent.

"The BNP, which has not accepted any responsibility for the election-related violence in 2014 that left hundreds dead (and saw hundreds of Hindu homes and shops vandalised), is again attempting to oust the government by force, in alliance with the

Jamaat-e-Islami, which is alleged to have committed some of the worst abuses during that period.

"The party retains its core supporters and seems to have successfully mobilised its activists on the streets. Yet, its sole demand -- for a fresh election under a neutral caretaker -- is too narrow to generate the public support it needs to overcome the disadvantage of being out of parliament, and its political capital is fading fast as it again resorts to violence," says the Group.

The deep animosity and mistrust between leaders and parties were not inevitable. Despite a turbulent history, they earlier cooperated to end direct or indirect military rule and strengthen democracy, most recently during the 2007-2008 tenure of the military-backed caretaker government, it says.

"Rather than building on that cooperation, the two leaders have resorted to non-democratic methods to undermine each other," observes the Group.

A critical view ends

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party's plans and the government decisions, but I'm left in the dark," a meeting source quoted Mehedi as saying.

Usually the working committee -- the party's highest decision-making body -- meets once a month where Hasina sets the tone with her opening speech. Leaders rarely venture any opinions that might go against that tone, AL insiders say.

At Friday's meeting, Mehedi initially talked about the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) and Dhaka Bar Association elections due to be held soon.

Also a former SCBA secretary, he said although his party had been in power for the last six years, he was not aware of the selection of pro-AL candidates for elections to lawyers' organisations and appointments of public prosecutors.

According to meeting sources, he told Hasina that he had the right to know about these matters.

"I've been a central committee member for two terms ... But I don't know anything about court-related matters ... I don't know anything about the party decisions, govern-

ment strategies. I was never asked for opinion before a party decision was made," he was quoted as saying.

Mehedi also said being a central leader of the AL, he felt ignored because it seemed his opinions did not matter to the party. In many cases, the party made wrong decisions.

"I think you don't trust me and so you don't share anything with me," he told the meeting.

He lamented that he could not even get an appointment with Hasina.

At one stage, a senior AL leader asked Mehedi to stop, but Hasina asked him to go on.

When he finished his speech, some leaders asked him to apologise to the AL chief, which he instantly did.

Contacted for his comments, Mehedi said he was and would always stay loyal to Hasina. He declined to talk about his speech at the meeting.

About elections to the SCBA and Dhaka Bar Association, Hasina had told the meeting that in the last five years pro-AL candidates lost, but this time she herself would select candidates.

Prothom Alo editor gets bail

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A Thakurgaon court yesterday granted bail to Bangla daily Prothom Alo Editor Matiuir Rahman and photo-journalist Sajid Hossain in a case filed for "hurting religious sentiments."

Chief Judicial Magistrate Md Julfikar Ali Khan passed the order after the accused appeared before the court and sought bail.

The court also exempted Matiuir Rahman from personal appearance before it in the case, said Mostaq Alam, defendant's lawyer.

May 04 was fixed as the next date of hearing, he added.

Advocate Indronath Roy filed the case with Thakurgaon Chief Judicial Magistrate court against the two accused on

November 13, 2014, said the lawyer.

A Jhalakathi court had issued an arrest warrant against Matiuir Rahman after he failed to appear before it.

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