

# Khaleda will never succeed

## Says PM, slams BNP chief for not paying tributes to martyrs

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has no more strength to stand again following the failed hartal and blockade programmes.

"They [BNP-Jamaat] have failed and they would never succeed... All have turned their backs on the BNP chief... To whom will she now set her face?" she said.

Hasina, also the president of Awami League, was speaking as the chief guest at a discussion, organised by her party at Krishibid Institution Auditorium in Dhaka, to mark the Independence Day.

Continuing her scathing attack on the BNP chief, she said Khaleda has proved herself a cohort of the Pakistani occupation forces by not paying tributes to the language martyrs on February 21 and to the Liberation War heroes on March 26.

When the current government was taking Bangladesh ahead towards development, Khaleda with Jamaat's help unleashed destructive acts across the country and started killing people like the Pakistani forces had done in 1971, she said.

AL leaders Amir Hossain Amu, Tofail Ahmed, Sheikh Fazlul Karim Selim, Matia Chowdhury, Mahbubul Alam Hanif and AFM Bahauddin Nasim, among others, spoke at the programme. Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor recited a poem.



The narrow bridge, top left, at Langalbandh of Rajghat in Narayanganj. Rumours that the bridge was collapsing led to a stampede of the crowd heading towards the riverbank, top right, for the Astami Snan. Abandoned clothes and shoes; vermilion left scattered on the ground; a woman, bottom left, crying after losing her husband and mother-in-law in the stampede.



PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

# US cares for Bangladesh

## Nisha Biswal at Independence Day reception

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Nisha Desai Biswal says her country cares for Bangladesh and maintains that Bangladesh-US relations are "larger and stronger than ever".

She recalls Senator Kennedy's message he delivered in Dhaka in February 1972 immediately after independence, "I have come here to say that America cares."

"Today, 44 years since independence of Bangladesh, the message remains the same: 'America cares,'" Biswal adds.

She was addressing the Independence Day reception as the guest of honour on Thursday evening at the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC, according to a message received yesterday.

Bangladesh Ambassador to US Mohammad Ziauddin, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat, a good number of foreign diplomats, several former US ambassadors to Bangladesh, State Department officials and top civil and military officials attended the programme.

Besides, representatives of the civil

society, senior journalists, artists, Awami League leaders of the US chapter and a number of Bangladeshi expatriates attended the reception held at the Chancery's Bangabandhu auditorium.

In her speech, Biswal said Bangladesh and the United States were strong partners in countering terrorism and ensuring regional and global security.

Making a flashback on a banyan tree planted by Senator Kennedy on Dhaka University campus in 1972 as a symbol of friendship, she said that banyan tree, also known as Kennedy Tree, had grown larger and stronger, its roots run deep, its trunk stout broad, and its branches had reached high.

"It is larger and stronger than ever, and it is still growing -- just like the friendship between our two people," she observed.

Biswal added, "We are optimistic that Bangladeshis, of all political stripes, will demonstrate the foresight and leadership to chart a path toward an inclusive democracy based on peaceful expression."

The reception was followed by a cultural show rendering patriotic songs and music.

# Stampede kills 10 devotees

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Mujibor Rahman, an owner of a book shop at the site, claimed a man abruptly fell on the bridge. A few others then came forward to help him stand up, creating an obstacle to the huge flow of crowd and it was then the rumour was spread.

Termed the stampede the "worst incident ever" in many decades, minority leaders alleged that the rumour was spread by local pickpockets and muggers to rob devotees of their ornaments and money. They also claimed the tragedy resulted from utter mismanagement by the authorities concerned and

the indifference of law enforcers. Bangladesh Puja Udjapon Parishad President Kajal Devnath alleged that the stampede was planned by petty local criminals who had been on the lookout for creating a chaos at the site every now and then since the morning.

A gold bangle worn by one of the deceased was reported to have gone missing, said Kajal who visited the scene after the stampede occurred. Though ASP Forkan claimed that police did their best to prevent the tragedy from taking place, witnesses and victims said nobody was seen to discipline the crowd milling around the place.

the indifference of law enforcers.

Local MP Selim Osman has directed law enforcers to investigate the stampede thoroughly, said a senior police official wishing anonymity.

The dead are Bhagabati Das, 48; Rani Das, 25; Tulsi Devnath, 55; Suchitra Rani Saha, 70; Kakon Saha, 50; Ranjit Nandi, 52; Nakul Chandra Ghose; Nitya Das Dhopa, 55;

footage from the CCTV cameras around the site be scrutinised to find out what actually happened.

"The stampede did not happen suddenly. It was caused by the greed of land grabbers and petty thieves, and the indifference of law enforcement agencies," said Kajal.

Police said they informed the district administration about the stampede thoroughly, said a senior police official wishing anonymity.

Minority leaders demanded that

# Rejoinder, our reply

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focussed on the feasibility of the project and economic analysis. So far, no consultant has been appointed for the construction of the Karnaphuli tunnel."

It added that the BBA was shortly going to appoint a consulting firm for design in detail, cost estimation and supervision.

"An MoU was signed between the government of Bangladesh and the government of China in June, 2014, during Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to China. The Chinese government agreed to construct the tunnel on Government-to-Government basis. As per the MoU, the Chinese government will support capable and reputable enterprises to undertake the construction of the multilane tunnel under the river Karnaphuli. Accordingly, the Chinese government nominated CCCC for implementation of the project. The nomination was communicated to BBA by the Chinese embassy in Dhaka through the Economic Relations Division. The BBA has nothing to do with the nomination process. It was absolutely an affair of the Chinese government. But before finalising the contract, the BBA has to seek approval from the government.

"Again the Public Procurement Act 2006 clearly states in section 3(2)(d) that the terms and conditions of any agreement with a foreign country/organisation shall prevail over provisions laid in the PPA. So the nomination of the CCCC by the Chinese government does not go against any provisions of the PPA.

"The news item also mentioned that a former Awami League minister's family was unofficially acting as the CCCC's agent. CCCC, in fact is a state-owned company of China. Even, no Chinese or any individual is a partner of CCCC."

**OUR REPLY**  
On March 24, 2011, the cabinet's purchase committee approved the CCCC-Arup as the "consultant" for the feasibility study for the project. The consultant's report was approved in April 2013, which serves as the source of a host of very important decisive technical issues, including project cost and location.

As per the Public Procurement Regulation sub-clause 55(4), "If any person (company) hired to provide consulting services for the preparation or implementation of a project, then that person (company) and any of its affiliates, shall be disqualified from

subsequently supplying goods, providing consulting services, performing physical services or work resulting from or directly related to the person's earlier consulting services."

This directly applies to the CCCC in the Karnaphuli tunnel project when it is being selected as the constructor.

The rejoinder referred to Public Procurement Act (PPA) 2006 section 3(2)(d), under which the terms and conditions of any agreement with a foreign country would prevail over the PPA, and the rejoinder related it to the MoU signed with China during the PM's visit in June 9, 2014; and subsequent nomination of the CCCC by the Chinese embassy.

But the MoU with Chinese government does not say anything about the CCCC. The relevant part of the MoU says, "The Chinese side will support capable and reputable enterprises to undertake the Multi Lane Road Tunnel Project..."

According to officials of the Central Procurement Technical Unit (CPTU) of the planning ministry, there is nothing binding in the MoU with China that forces the government to accept whatever company to be nominated by China and also, the PPA 2006's provision was not appli-

cable here.

Why the BBA would relinquish its authority and dignity in picking up the most qualified company in the project, even in a restrictive procurement process like a government-to-government deal, was not explained in the rejoinder. When The Daily Star contacted a BBA senior official yesterday on this matter, he said the BBA did not relinquish its authority as it would evaluate the CCCC's technical capability during upcoming negotiations over its commercial proposal.

In such a case, if the BBA ever disqualified the CCCC it would again have to get a new nominee from China upon wasting a lot of time.

The PPR restricts a consultant from getting construction job because of conflict of interest that may lead to low quality work, said a senior official of the CPTU.

While the rejoinder claims that no state-owned company of China had any individual partner, the fact is most Chinese and other foreign companies take help from local agencies to facilitate tendering process under unofficial arrangements as most of them do not run their offices in Dhaka.

We stand by our story.

# 7 lakh Bangla words

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ministry, and GDG Bangla jointly organised 81 events across the country from where over 4,000 volunteers made the entries.

Besides, there were 69 other informal events at home and abroad. "The estimated number of volunteers from across the world would be seven to eight thousands," said Javed.

"We set a target to contribute over three lakh words and phrases in 24 hours on the eve of the Independence Day. But it exceeded the target and reached around seven lakh in a single day," said Javed, adding that they had set the target to break the record of three lakh entries of Spanish words and phrases in one day.

Khan Md Anarus Salam, the country engineering consultant of Google for Bangladesh, told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday evening, "Google will officially announce it on Monday."

Asked how the entries reached such a high number, Javed said there were multiple entries which Google would verify and then choose the most accurate translation of a word or phrase before letting users use them online.

This inputs would enrich Bangla in Google Translate and people across the globe would be able to translate Bangla into over 90 languages and also text of those languages into Bangla, said Javed.

Even though Bangla, the seventh most spoken language in the world, was included in Google Translate in 2011 as the 65th language, words and phrases stock was not rich enough for accurate translations.

## Holy dip ends

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at least 10 people including Bhagabati, 48, and Rakhi, 25. Police reached the scene around 20 minutes later and recovered the bodies.

In the afternoon, Jony returned home in the capital's Lalbagh with the two bodies. He said he was holding his wife's hand until the rush of panic-stricken people forced him to let go of her.

Many children were missing after the stampede. A volunteers' platform, Sarodanjoly Forum Bangladesh, helped over 50 kids get reunited with their families.

Sumon Barman, chief coordinator of the platform, said they managed to get into the frenzied crowds and save the kids.

Hindu leaders blamed local criminals for spreading the rumours to rob devotees of valuables.

Police handed over eight other bodies to the victims' families.

Priest Sangram Chakraborty was consoling the victims' family members: "Taking a dip in the Brahmaputra means getting rid of every sin. Your near and dear ones are now as clean as a white paper."

# Saudi jets target militia bases

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region said they supported the air campaign, but Houthi forces advanced south despite the airstrikes and Pakistan, named by Saudi Arabia on Thursday as a partner, said it had made no decision on whether to contribute.

Riyadh's move is the latest front in a growing regional contest for power with Iran that is also playing out in Syria, where Tehran backs Assad's government against mainly Sunni rebels, and Iraq, where Iranian-backed Shi'ite militias are playing a major role in fighting.

Sunni monarchies in the Gulf are backing embattled Yemeni President Abd-Rabbu Mansour Hadi and his fellow Sunnis in the country's south against the Shia advance.

Yemeni Foreign Minister Riyadh Yaseen, asked if the campaign would last days, weeks or more, told Saudi-owned al-Arabiya television: "I expect that this operation will not go on for long. I think it will be days."

He said the door was still open for dialogue with the Houthis, while in a Facebook posting, Hadi urged Yemenis to be patient, saying the "rebels", a reference to Houthis, would soon be gone.

But Houthi fighters and forces allied to Saleh entered the southern provinces of Abyan and Shabwa yesterday through the central province of Bayda, extending their reach into the south, according to tribal sources.

The fighters entered the city of Lohar in Abyan after clashes with tribal forces loyal to Hadi, and also took over Bayhan in Shabwa, where they faced less resistance.

Mosques in Riyadh yesterday preached fiery sermons against the Houthis and their Iranian allies, describing the fight as a religious duty. Saudi Arabia's top clerical council issued a fatwa on Thursday giving its blessing to the campaign.

In the Iranian capital Tehran, Friday prayer leader Ayatollah Kazem Sadeghi described the attacks as "an aggression

and interference in Yemen's internal affairs".

Residents said aircraft targeted bases around Sanaa of Republican Guards allied to the Houthis, including one near the presidential compound in a southern district, around dawn and also struck near a military installation that houses missiles.

## OIL REGION HIT

The Republican Guards are loyal to former president Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Houthi's main ally who retains wide power despite having stepped down in 2011 after Arab Spring protests.

Earlier air strikes south of the city and in the oil-producing Marib region appeared to target military installations also affiliated with Saleh. Yemeni oil flows through the Marib pipeline, its main export route, at a rate of around 70,000 barrels per day (bpd). The well-armed tribes are the de facto authority in the central province so their support for the air strikes was significant.

Warplanes also hit two districts in the Houthis' northerly home province of Saada, tribal sources said. The strikes hit a market in Kafaf-al-Bokaa in the north of Saada, killing or wounding 15 people, they said. Shada district was also struck.

The coalition began air strikes on Thursday to try to roll back Houthi gains in the Arabian Peninsula country and to shore up the authority of embattled President Hadi, who has been holed up in Aden after fleeing Sanaa in February.

Hadi left Aden on Thursday and is due to attend an Arab summit meeting in Egypt on Saturday, where he aims to build Arab support for the air strikes. He arrived in Saudi Arabia on Thursday by way of Oman, where a foreign ministry official said he had a medical check up before heading on to the kingdom.

The Saudi campaign raised morale among some Gulf Arabs who view Tehran's growing influence in the region with suspicion.