

Target boosting rural economy

PM on 'One House, One Farm' project

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday directed the authorities concerned to work with sincerity for proper implementation of the "One House, One Farm" project.

"Our goal is to strengthen the rural economy through this project," she told a meeting of the advisory council of the project at the PMO in the capital.

PM's Press Secretary AKM Shameem Chowdhuri briefed reporters after the meeting.

Hasina said the aim of her party's politics was to ensure development of the poor, make them self-reliant and reduce gap between the rich and the poor.

"The produce in rural areas are being marketed while each and every household under the 'One House, One Farm' project is being transformed into a self-reliant unit through implementation of the project," she said.

The beneficiaries under the project are getting enough nutrition through rearing poultry birds and cultivating fishes, which is helping people of the lower class rise to middle class status, the PM told the meeting.

"This project will make fruitful contributions to the country's socio-economic

development shortly," she said.

The meeting reviewed the progress its implementation and decided to continue intensive monitoring.

So far some 274 cooperatives-based markets at district and upazila levels have been set up for marketing the produce of beneficiaries apart from growth centres, it was informed.

The meeting stressed the need for continuing efforts to set up more such markets.

Some 40,527 villages apart from unions and wards have come under the project network, while 'Palli Sanchay Bank' has been set up for successful implementation of the project.

Out of some of the impacts of the project, setting up of a Tk 2,000 crore permanent fund is a milestone for the government with the active participation of some 22 lakh beneficiary households, including 60 percent female members.

The annual income of the project members have increased by Tk 10,921 through income-generating activities.

With the implementation of the project, the number of low-income families is gradually declining in the project areas, while that of self-reliant families are rising.



Students of Institute of Fine Arts of Dhaka University yesterday go to Shahbagh Police Station in procession to protest against the Pahela Baishakh sexual assault on DU campus. Police had to close the gate of the station.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Hilsa coming back to rivers

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now available in 10 rivers only, according to the officials of the Department of Fisheries (DoF).

However, recent conservation efforts by the government resulted in an increased migration of hilsas from the Bay of Bengal to Rajshahi and India's Murshidabad regions through the Padma.

"It's a good news that hilsas are returning to the Padma river. We noticed fishermen have been catching hilsas in the Padma in the Rajshahi region again for the last couple of years," said DoF Deputy Director Masud Ara Momi.

A SUCCESSFUL INITIATIVE

Hilsa production in the country slumped to 1.99 lakh tonnes in 2002-03 season, creating a nationwide crisis of the fish.

This prompted the government to initiate a project to conserve jatka (hilsa less than 10 inches long) in 2004. Initially, raising awareness and dissuading fishermen from catching brood hilsa was the target.

But to bolster its efforts, the government slapped a ban on fishing jatka and mother hilsas in five breeding zones for eight months between November and June from 2007-08

season.

Four of these zones are 100km-stretch of the Meghna from Shatnol in Chandpur to Char Alexander in Laximpur, 90km-stretch of the Shahbazpur tributary of the Meghna from Madanpur/Char Ilsha to Char Piyal in Bhola, 100km-stretch of the Tetulia from Bhola's Bheduria to Patuakhali's Char Rustam, and 20km-stretch of the lower Padma in Naria-Bhedorganj of Shariatpur. Apart from the eight-month-long ban on catching hilsa and jatka, all kinds of fishing are prohibited in these zones between March and April.

The other nursery ground is 40km-stretch of the Andharmanik in Patuakhali's Kalapara. All sorts of fishing are banned here between November and January.

Moreover, gill net, which is used to catch jatka, was banned.

These steps proved really effective. The production of hilsa shot up to 2.9 lakh tonnes in the very first season after the ban was put in place, from 1.99 lakh tonnes five seasons ago, DoF statistics show.

The figure got only higher and higher in the following years to stand at 3.85 lakh tonnes, more than 11

percent of the country's annual fish production, in 2013-14 fiscal year.

However, the current conservation project will end in June. What will happen then?

"We will extend the project's tenure after that," Fisheries and Livestock Minister Mohammed Sayedul Haque told The Daily Star.

Following Bangladesh's example, the government of India also took the same initiative a couple of years back to increase the production of hilsa, a popular fish among the people of West Bengal, Odisha, Tripura, Assam and some other states of the country.

GOOD BUT COULD BE BETTER

Praising the government initiatives in conserving hilsa, experts think further success can be achieved by ensuring proper compensation for fishermen and completely stopping the use of gill net.

The government has registered about half a million fishermen who are affected by the eight-month-long ban on hilsa fishing. But only 2.24 lakh of them receive compensation and that too 40kg rice a month only which is not enough.

"A five-member family needs at least three kilograms of rice a day. So, a

fisherman family should get 90-100kg rice and at least Tk 1,000 in cash every month to meet their demands," said Fanihbushan Malo, secretary general of Jatiya Matsajibi Samity, a platform of fishermen.

Besides, more than half of the affected fishermen do not receive any government assistance and eventually are forced to catch hilsa broods illegally during the ban period.

"If all the hilsa fishermen are not compensated properly, they should not be blamed for catching jatka," Fanihbushan commented.

When his attention was drawn to this, a DoF official said, "We have plans to create a trust fund with a portion of the income from exporting hilsa. This fund will be used for hilsa management and compensating fishermen during the ban." He wished anonymity as he was not authorised to talk to the media.

On stopping the use of gill net, Fisheries Minister Sayedul Haque said the government would soon start drives against gill net soon as the High Court has scrapped all 57 writs against the law banning manufacturing and use of the net.

Zahid Habib, director of the Jatka Conservation Project, said, "It is possi-

ble to further increase hilsa production if the government provides us with more logistic supports, including manpower and funding."

Pollution is another menace standing in the way of increasing hilsa population.

"Only three decades ago, hilsa was available in the Kaliganga and the Shitalakkhya rivers. But both the rivers are now so excessively polluted that not even a single hilsa is found there now," said Dr GC Halder, a retired scientist of Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute.

The country's hilsa production, which accounts almost 60 percent of the global production, can be furthered through systematic steps taken by the government, said academic-researcher-economist Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, also a former adviser to a caretaker government.

In his study titled "Hilsa and Hilsa Fishermen" published in December last year, he stated around 37 percent hilsa fishermen have to take loans every year as they cannot fish during the ban period. And this problem should also be addressed to prevent fishermen from ignoring the ban.

Eyes wide shut

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return to any crowd of women again.

However, the authorities finally formed two committees yesterday to investigate the crime. The police have also withdrawn Shahbagh Thana Sub-Inspector Ashraf Alam who has been accused of releasing at least two molesters -- detained by Chhatra Union leaders who tried to protect the women that day -- instead of putting him behind bars.

But this move of the police should have been a procedural action by them on the first day. Under public pressure they are now taking some steps and we are not sure if this is sincere.

This is not the first time the police have failed to carry out their basic professional responsibility. Back in February when blogger Avijit Roy was hacked to death by some militants in the same area, Avijit's wife and other people cried for help. The cops were nearby, but they did not move to

save Avijit or capture the culprits.

In a follow-up news item on Avijit's incident, we learnt that the police posted on Dhaka University premises did not respond to any scuffle between people in the area because it may be just some "student vs student" affair; or may be some political activists are involved there and thereby an interference may trigger political backlash.

If the police maintain such hands-off policy on the campus, it would be natural for the cops not to act professionally when they are needed the most. We believe this is exactly what had happened in the case of the Pahela Baishakh incident.

There is no room for taking this incident of sexual assault lightly. For many years, religious fanatics have been campaigning against Pahela Baishakh, calling it "anti-Islamic" and wrongfully citing holy verses to establish that Islam has banned cultural activities like celebrating a new

year. While such an interpretation is unfounded and irrelevant, many people fall for such arguments.

We have seen that after the Pahela Baishakh assault, some people blamed the women for "dressing up inappropriately", thus putting the blame on the women for the incident and justifying their acts of molestation. If one accepts such an argument, then one also has to declare a mugger innocent because it's your fault to carry a wallet full of money, and a killer innocent because it's your fault to be disliked by the killer.

The April 14 incident may be a work of a group of fanatics or a group of pervers and rapists-in-the-making.

Therefore, the police and the authorities must break their eyes-wide-shut state and ensure that women can be safe and independent everywhere including the streets and festivals.

Thumbs up

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Tamim, then he probably provided an evidence for his critics that he was ready to overcome it by making a run-a-ball 116 not out that contained 17 sweetly timed boundaries and a down the track six over long-on against pacer Junaid Khan.

Tamim began the chase with a flurry of boundaries along with stylish Soumya Sarkar. Sarkar failed to temper his game after smashing four boundaries and was dismissed duely as he was caught behind attempting another big shot for 17. However, their aggression set the tone and destabilised the Pakistan attack from where the visitors failed to recover and come back into the match.

The southpaw batsman, completed his second successive hundred, becoming only the third Bangladeshi batsman to achieve it after Shahriar Nafees and Riyad, in style by glancing away Junaid for a boundary and this time he had different celebration as he held his hands aloft with joy and then swung his bat vigorously in the air.

On the other hand, Mushfiqur once again showed that he could destroy any attack by playing his perfect slog sweeps as he once again came in beside Tamim. The right-hander's 70-ball 65 that featured eight boundaries and a six was another example of brilliant batsmanship and was yet another chapter in the thriving partnership that he is quickly forging with Tamim, much to Bangladesh's pleasure.

Earlier, the Bangladesh bowlers made early inroads after the visitors decided to bat and reduced them to 77 for 5 in the 22nd over. Two left-arm spinners Shakib and Sunny muffled the batsmen in the middle overs, but Saad Nasim and Haris Sohail initiated Pakistan's recovery act with a busy 77-run partnership. Nasim and Wahab Riaz, who hit an unbeaten 51, then plundered 49 from the last five overs to lift Pakistan to 239 for 6.

In the end, that recovery act hardly posed any threat for Bangladesh batting to stop them from the series win.

EC may seek army

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Auditorium, Rakibuddin told journalists, "We have asked the law enforcement agencies to use twice the force if anyone attempts to do anything illegal at any polling centre."

"We will not take any risk. We will take maximum cautionary measures to hold free, fair and credible polls."

According to meeting sources, the high-ups of law enforcement agencies told the EC officials that there was no need to deploy army as the situation in both the cities was peaceful, and that the regular forces were enough to maintain law and order.

Lt Gen Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiq Huq, principal staff officer of the Armed Forces Division, said they were ready to work if the government decided to deploy army personnel during the polls.

On the EC's plan to deploy a striking force in every three ward, Inspector General of Police AKM Shahidul

Hoque said the force comprising police, APBN and ansar personnel should be deployed in each ward.

Officials of intelligence agencies cautioned that tensions might increase ahead of the elections, as several candidates belonging to one political party are contesting the polls in the same ward.

Sensing defeat, some candidates might try to create anarchy or indulge in violence, they said.

Besides, if BNP-backed candidates suffer defeat in the polls, the party might use it as a tool for waging anti-government movement, they added.

A police official told the meeting that some vested quarters might run smear campaigns by distorting poll-related information to tarnish the image of government and the EC.

An election commissioner suggested checking background of the presiding and polling officers to see whether they have any political affiliation, said meeting sources.

Khaleda faces obstruction in campaign

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Later, over 100 ruling party men carrying sticks with black flags in three separate groups chased her motorcade and blocked roads while it was passing Rajlaxmi Complex, Rajuk Commercial Complex and North Tower in Uttara.

Led by SM Mahubub and Afsar Uddin, joint secretary and organising secretary of Uttara thana AL, and Sayedul Islam, organising secretary of Uttara West Chhatra League, ruling party activists chanted slogans against Khaleda, denouncing the killing of innocent people during the BNP-led hartal and blockade.

From Uttara, she went to the city's Norda. Talking to reporters there, she claimed her electioneering was facing a lot of obstacles.

"But I don't care -- people are with us. Tabith's popularity is driving the Awami League mad. It is restoring to criminal activities," Khaleda said after

wrapping up her electioneering at Norda.

During her campaign at Suvastu Nazari Valley, Shahjhadpur in Badda, she told reporters that they were getting huge response from voters.

"Revolution will take place if voters can cast their votes properly on the polls day," she said, adding the BNP was demanding army deployment for a free and fair city corporation election. "But the Awami League does not want it as it has planned to rig the election."

When Khaleda reached Sector-1 of Uttara, some 100 AL men carrying black flags marched towards the motorcade from opposite direction. In spite of police members and Khaleda's personal security personnel's vigilance, some protesters reached close to the BNP chief's vehicle and kept shouting at her.

However, police and Khaleda's security personnel forced them away

from the motorcade, said Sayrul Kabir Khan, a member of BNP chief's media wing.

Surrounded by the party men, police and Khaleda's security personnel, her vehicle sped towards Amir Plaza, the next stop of her campaign. On the way, agitators chased the car for about 100 yards.

After Amir Plaza, Khaleda went to House Building area of Sector-7 where she faced similar demonstration by the ruling party men.

It was the second consecutive day of her campaign for Tabith, the party-backed mayoral hopeful for Dhaka North City Corporation.

Khaleda visited several shops and shopping malls in Uttara, Norda and Badda with BNP supporters distributing leaflets and posters among people, and using loud hailers.

She returned home around 9:15pm. AL'S PLAN Sources said the AL in a planned way

Police yet to

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Asaduzzaman Miah said he was not aware of this particular camera.

"Now that the matter has been brought to my attention, I'll look into it," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

The footage that police have already released shows many incidents of assault on women.

Yet, it took law enforcers five days to admit that women were sexually assaulted.

Police also opened an investigation into the matter, says a press release.

About the investigation, the DMP commissioner said, "We must establish in the court, by means of evidence, that the jostling noticed surrounding a woman in the footage was driven by sexual intentions."

However, the DMP boss on April 15 had claimed no incident or act of molestation had taken place in the area. He had also said a female student had gone to the TSC area along with her friend when a group of students had "stalked" her and another group had protested the incident.

While talking to this correspondent yesterday, he also contradicted the DMP Additional Commissioner Mohammad Ibrahim Fatemi that Sub-Inspector Ashraful Islam was closed as an action against his negligence of duty.

Ashraful is accused of releasing at least two youths who were caught molesting women by Bangladesh Chhatra Union activists on April 14.

A register at Shahbagh police station showed four men were brought in to the station on the day. Two of them were shown to be held on charges of stealing cell phones with no recovery. "Released by the order of the officer-in-charge (investigation)," read a note written beside one of the names.

Arabs to meet on joint force

AFP, Cairo

Arab military chiefs will meet this week in Cairo to discuss the forming of a joint military force to fight the region's growing extremist threat, an Arab League official said yesterday.

After Arab League leaders agreed to create such a force at a March summit in Egypt, army chiefs from member states will hold talks on Wednesday on details of how the force will be created, its role and its financing, a League source told AFP.

yesterday staged the demonstrations as the party wanted to embarrass the BNP chief during her campaign.

Recently at a programme, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said Khaleda might face people's resistance if she took to the streets.

Asked about yesterday's protest, Afsar Uddin of Uttara thana Awami League, said people staged demonstration on their own to register protest against Khaleda's "violent politics".

Afsar, also an AL-backed councillor candidate for DNCC Ward-1, said he was in Rampura when Khaleda was visiting Uttara.

Insiders said the ruling party has planned that wherever Khaleda would go for campaigning, it would distribute leaflets highlighting recent blockade violence and killings.

The party has also planned to organise human chain by those who were affected during the opposition's anti-government movement.