



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina pays a courtesy call on President Abdul Hamid at the Bangabhaban yesterday. During the one-hour meeting, Hasina inquired about Hamid's health, according to the president's press secretary. PHOTO: PTI

Goal regional

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Briefing reporters after the meeting, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said the government planned to extend the 51km rail route from Kulara to Shahbazzpur to the Indian border by setting up an additional 9km rail track and upgrade the track into a dual-gauge one to connect with the regional railway network and Trans-Asian railway network.

This will help flourish regional trade and tourism, he said.

An official of the planning ministry said there used to be rail communications between Bangladesh and India on this route, but it stopped in 1965. After that, trains ran inside Bangladesh up to Shahbazzpur, but that too stopped in 2002.

Under the previous Congress government, India agreed to extend its soft loan to Bangladesh for rebuilding the rail line so that goods could be transported between the western part

of the country and the Seven Sister States of northeast India.

The primary work of the project has already started and it is scheduled to be completed by June 2017, according to the planning ministry.

The Ecne yesterday approved nine development projects worth Tk 5,868 crore.

A revised project to construct a new railway track from Khulna to Mongla Port was also approved.

The project cost was estimated to be Tk 1,721 crore when it was first approved in 2010.

But the Ecne yesterday revised the cost to Tk 3,801 crore, 120 percent more than its first estimate.

For the project, India will provide Tk 2,371 crore in loan and the government will fund the rest Tk 1,430 crore.

Under the project, a 65-km broad gauge railway track along with 21km loop line would be set up from Khulna

to Mongla Port.

Explaining the reason for the additional cost of the project, Mustafa Kamal said a 717 metre rail bridge would have to be constructed over the Rupsha river due to the change in the alignment of the rail route.

He said the change in the alignment increased the length of the rail route by 12km.

All these would cost around Tk 2,200 crore.

Besides, Tk 1,000 crore would be required for acquiring 678 acres of land, he said.

The project will complete in June 2018.

A planning ministry official said the government had been considering allowing transport of goods to India, Nepal and Bhutan through Mongla Port. For this reason, the rail track would be converted to dual-gauge so that the trains could directly enter India.

Fruits boom in the hills

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mango, jackfruit, litchi and almond on five hectares this year. He feared that he won't have enough profit.

"There is no cold storage and fruit processing centre in our locality. Had we had them, we would have made a good profit," he said on Monday.

"I am expecting profits of Tk 40,000 and Tk 1,50,000 from the sales of almonds and mangoes. The profits

would have increased by three times if there were cold storages and fruit processing centres in the district," added Rialdo.

Zawn Thang Karbari of Farukpara and Lal Nun Nuam Bawm of Monglaipara in Ruma made similar claims. They blamed poor road networks and inadequate marketing facilities for their limited profit from fruit farming.

Ruma upazila is just four kilometres from Bandarban town.

"We've a good harvest this year. But we couldn't market our produce in time due to poor communications," said Zawn Thang Karbari.

Omar Faruk, agriculture officer in Bandarban, admitted that growers in the hills were not making enough profit from fruit farming due to the problems.

Juicy relief all around

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pesticides unnecessarily. Many farmers were given training to grow fruits in organic ways. Some farmers have started using organic fruit bags to protect fruits from pest attacks," said Sunil Chandra Dhar, director, Horticulture Wing of the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Mango growers usually spray pesticides 20 to 30 times every season. But with these bags, they don't need to do so more than thrice. This year, the government imported about 1.5 lakh bags and distributed those among farmers in eight districts. Each bag, which can wrap a whole cluster, cost farmers Tk 5.

The DAE is working to further promote this method.

Also, the district administration has banned early harvest of mangoes in Chapainawabganj, known as the country's mango capital. There, farmers have been asked not to harvest mangoes before June 1.

This has been done to stop use of ripening agents on unripe fruits.

At least 15 percent of the country's total mango production comes from the district.

Farmers there can harvest varieties like *Kancha-mitha* and some varieties of *guti* before June 1 but not

Gopalbhogh, *Khirsapat* (*Himsagar*) and other varieties.

Sorof Uddin, senior scientific officer of Regional Horticulture Research Station, said farmers in the past would start harvesting mangoes in mid-May and would apply calcium carbide and other ripening agents harmful to health.

However, despite the government measures, some consumers are still worried.

"I have not bought any mango yet. I am waiting for the proper time because the possibility and the extent of using hazardous ripening hormones will reduce then," said Sarwar Hossain, a service holder.

Last year, mango and jackfruit productions were 17.94 lakh tonnes and 16.18 lakh tonnes respectively. This year, their production will grow by 5 percent each, DAE officials said.

Though hailstorms hit several times and fogs occurred during the flowering season, production of mangos is reported to be good in all 64 districts of the country.

"Timely rainfall has helped the bumper production this year," said Al Hasan Sadi, a mango orchard owner from Shibganj upazila in Chapainawabganj.

Production of litchi, watermelon,

pineapple and guava is expected to rise by two to three percent compared to last year, according to DAE officials.

Among commercially important varieties, *Khirsapat* or *Himsagar*, have already hit the market, though on a limited scale. *Lengra*, *Amrapali* and *Fazli* will be available after mid-June.

Of the several varieties of litchis from Dinajpur, only *Madrazi* is available in the market. Other popular varieties, including *Bombay*, *China* and *Bedana*, will start arriving in the market from next week.

This year, farmers in Dinajpur grew litchis on 4,100 hectares of land where production is expected to be up to 30,000 tonnes, according to the district DAE.

Pabna, the second biggest litchi growing district after Dinajpur, will grow some 2,800 tonnes.

This mouthwatering fruit has grown well in Lalmonirhat, Sonargaon, Narayanganj and the three hill districts as well.

Production of watermelon, jackfruit and pineapple is also expected to rise and they all have already hit the market.

[Our correspondents from Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi University, Dinajpur, Pabna and Lalmonirhat contributed to this story.]

Hopes run high over June 6

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outstanding issues, including trade imbalance, they said.

Modi could also announce supply of additional 500 megawatt power to Bangladesh, easing of visa regime, and e-Tourist Visa facilities for Bangladeshi citizens.

On the other hand, the Bangladesh PM is expected to offer an exclusive economic zone for Indian investments, said diplomatic sources in Dhaka.

The Indian PM will hold wide-ranging talks with his Bangladesh counterpart. The two sides are expected to sign about a dozen important deals covering trade and investment, road, rail and sea connectivity, energy and disaster management.

Setting the tone for Modi's upcoming visit, Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh said India and Bangladesh would soon approve the long-pending Teesta river water-sharing agreement.

"Both the countries will give their approval to it very soon. We are hopeful that we will get full cooperation from West Bengal government," Singh said at a press conference in Kolkata yesterday.

have been on an upswing ever since the Hasina government came to power in January 2009.

In a statement yesterday, Bangladesh foreign ministry said, "The visit is expected to further strengthen the excellent relationship between the two countries."

India's external affairs ministry made a similar announcement saying the visit "reflects the importance attached by India to the bilateral relationship."

This will be Modi's 19th foreign visit since he assumed power on May 26, 2014. The announcement comes at a time when the BJP celebrates the Modi government's one year in power.

As part of a policy to deepen engagement with India's immediate neighbours, Modi had earlier visited Bhutan, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

Following the passage of the Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) bill by the Indian parliament, The Daily Star first reported on May 8 that Modi would visit Bangladesh in the first week of June.

A diplomatic source in New Delhi said Modi had made a commitment to visit Dhaka after resolving at least one of the two major pending issues -- the

LBA and Teesta water sharing.

Yesterday afternoon, high-ups of Bangladesh foreign ministry had a meeting with Pankaj Saran, Indian high commissioner in Dhaka. Senior officials of various line ministries attended the meeting that finalised the draft schedule of the Indian PM's visit.

DEALS TO BE SIGNED
The two countries will sign deals for renewing the amended India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement and the amended Protocol on Inland Water Transit and Trade.

Agreements will also be signed on coastal shipping, maritime security, the second line of credit of \$2 billion to Bangladesh, and Dhaka-Shillong-Guwahati and Kolkata-Dhaka-Agartala bus services.

Besides, deals will be signed in the areas of energy cooperation and import of power from India, maritime cooperation in the Bay of Bengal, disaster management, environment, education and culture.

Standards institutes of the two countries will ink agreements for certifying Bangladesh-made products for their easy access to Indian market.

Unique Kuakata

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native species like Korai, Gewa and Kewra were washed away last year.

The disappearing shoreline is also threatening the local tourism industry in the southern seaside town, 270 kilometres from the capital.

Some 500 seaside souvenir shops once dotting the zero point had to be moved back some 400 feet in 2007. Two years later, a government rest house with a built-in biogas plant had to be demolished.

In an effort to prevent the erosion, Water Development Board in Kuakata plans on dropping concrete blocks along a 2.3-kilometre stretch before the zero point.

World Bank has been asked to fund the around Tk 200 crore project as per the proposal submitted to it on July 26 last year, according to Sub-Divisional Engineer Md Shahidul Islam.

While this would weaken the force of the waves, it would also limit visitors' movement by radically changing the appearance of the beach, inevitably endangering the coastal wildlife.

The situation calls for in-depth studies on the possible effects of sea-defences on this beach, the geographic location of which offers the view of both sunrise and sunset, making it unique in the world.

Toll reaches

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Rani, special commissioner for disaster management in the state.

"We have also requested NGOs and government organisations to open up drinking water camps so that water will be readily available for all the people in the towns."

Large parts of India, including the capital New Delhi, have endured days of sweltering heat, prompting fears of power cuts as energy-guzzling air conditioners work overtime.

The Hindustan Times daily said the maximum temperature in the capital hit a two-year high of 45.5 degrees Celsius on Monday -- five degrees higher than the seasonal average.

The paper carried a front-page photo of a main road in the city melting in the heat, with the white pedestrian crossing stripes curling and spreading into the black asphalt.

"It's baking hot out here -- our outing has turned into a nightmare," said Meena Sheshadri, a 37-year-old tourist from the western city of Pune who was visiting Delhi's India Gate monument with her children.

"My throat is parched, even though I've been constantly sipping water."

In Telangana state, which borders Andhra Pradesh in the south, 231 people have died in the last week as temperatures hit 48 degrees Celsius over the weekend.

In the western state of Orissa 11 people were confirmed to have died from the heat.

Another 13 people have died in the eastern state of West Bengal, where unions urged drivers in the city of Kolkata to stay off the roads during the day.

India's power industry has long struggled to meet rapidly rising demand in Asia's third largest economy, with poorly maintained transmission lines and overloaded grids.

The Hindustan Times warned that some of the hot, dry conditions could plunge the worst-affected states into drought before monsoon rains arrive.

The monsoon is forecast to hit the southern state of Kerala towards the end of this month before sweeping across the country, but it will be weeks before the rains reach the arid northern plains.

Good dream

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After the meeting, Planning Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal told reporters that the government had undertaken the project to provide social protection to the ultra-poor women by creating part-time job opportunity for them in the seasons when there is no work in the rural areas.

The minister also said under the scheme, a poor rural woman would be given Tk 200 as daily wage for working in rural road repair and maintenance. She could save Tk 50 in bank every day which would become Tk 25,000 in one and a half years.

Kamal said the woman could later invest the money in small businesses, which would help her come out of the poverty trap.

The project has been named "Strengthening Women's Ability for Productive New Opportunities" which will be called SWAPNO in short. This project will help the ultra-poor women to fulfil their dreams, said a planning ministry official.

The official said these women would be provided training by the NGOs so that they could create self-employment.

Around 22 NGOs would be engaged in the training which would cost around 4.99 percent of the total project cost and 3.62 percent would be spent on encouraging the women to participate in the training programme, the official added.

The women will be selected for the programme from 1,030 unions in 22 districts in the coastal areas, which are prone to poverty.

Nine dead in Brazil prison riot

AFF, Rio De Janeiro

Nine people died, one of them decapitated, in a prison mutiny in Brazil which ended Monday with the release of 70 hostages, police said.

"After 18 hours of negotiations, the mutiny has ended," a police spokesman told AFP from the facility at Feira de Santana, 100 kilometres (62 miles) from the northeastern city of Salvador

de Bahia.

Police said prisoners killed eight fellow inmates after the mutiny began late Sunday afternoon during family visits to the facility. A ninth died Monday of his injuries.

Prisoners armed with knives took visitors, including women and children, hostage and demanded to speak to local human rights commission officials about conditions.

Nine students caught

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As per Sabbir's instruction, Shaheen told her female friend Moumita to build up relationship with Shaheen.

As per the plan, Moumita asked Shimon to meet her in front of the Bangladesh Agriculture Research Institute at Joydevpur in Gazipur on Monday.

The Rab official added Shimon and his cousin Saddam went there on Monday around 11:30am. Eight to

nine people posting as detective dragged them into a microbus and drove towards Bhaoraid forest.

The kidnappers beat the duo indiscriminately and at one point asked Shimon to tell his brother who also lives in Singapore to send Tk 5 lakh.

The gang was busted as a woman saw the incident and told locals, who later contacted the local Rab camp.

The Rab team also seized the microbus.

Driverless trucks

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by itself on open stretches of road, freeing a driver to take breaks, check his emails and even watch DVDs.

The catch is that a qualified person must remain in front of the wheel at all times so they can take control if something goes wrong.

However, proponents say that the technology, once perfected, will reduce accidents by lessening the chance of human error, boost productivity and cut emissions.

It is perhaps ironic that fully driverless vehicles are already being used in low-speed, controlled environments.

Rio Tinto, for instance, operates over 50 self-drive trucks at its mines in Pilbara, Australia, while Lockheed Martin has built a range of autonomous trucks for the US Army.

One such is the SMSS vehicle which made its combat debut in Afghanistan in 2011.

According to Lockheed, it can "track and follow" the movements of a single soldier, transport supplies over rough terrain and carry out casualty evacuations, all without the aid of a human driver.

Where things get tricky is moving these vehicles onto public roads, with other vehicles and pedestrians.

Daimler's truck, for example, only works on freeways, and a human must take over when it reaches city streets -- a far more "complicated traffic environment", according to the company.

The good news, predicts the German consultancy Roland Berger, is that we will overcome these technical hurdles within the next 10-15 years -- in fact by 2030, we will probably have the capacity to take human drivers out of the equation entirely.

Much more challenging, however, will be solving the deeper social and legal barriers.

"There are some really big ethical issues," explains Wolfgang Bernhart, partner at Roland Berger.

Selection, not election

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However, in most of these 55 chapters, old faces remained at the helm of the committees. There was no voting in the councils of most units. The guardians of the party grassroots were selected through consensus.

For example, Sherpur AL held its council on May 19, first since 2003. Incumbent president Atiur Rahman Atik and general secretary Chandan Paul were given the charges for another term. Interestingly, the election process, the most important part of a council, lasted less than five minutes as there were no contenders.

In Patuakhali, Shahjahan Mia and Khan Mosharef Hossain became president and general secretary of the AL's district chapter through a council in December last year. They have been holding the posts for the over three decades now.

Sheikh Harun-ur-Rashid and SM Mostofa Rashidi Suja had been the president and the general secretary of Khulna district AL for 22 years. And they retained their posts through a council in November last year.

Only a handful districts -- including Rajshahi City, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Feni, Dinajpur, Kurigram and Natore -- went to voting.

And the results were surprising.

Rajshahi City unit got a new president and a new general secretary, Thakurgaon new president, Panchagarh new general secretary, Feni new president and new general secretary, Dinajpur new president and new general secretary, Kurigram new president and Natore new president and new general secretary.

New leaderships took charge of some units through consensus as well, but only in a negligible number of cases.

INCOMPLETE COMMITTEES

According to the party charter, a district unit has to hold council every three years to pick a 71-strong executive committee with 37 office bearers and 34 members.

Only six to seven of the 55 district

chapters have so far got full-fledged committees. The rest have only presidents and general secretaries in the committees.

The last council of the Barisal city AL was held in December, 2012. The then Barisal City Corporation mayor Shawkat Hossain Hiron was elected president and Afzalul Karim became general secretary of the chapter. More than two years have passed since the committee started its journey but it is yet to have all its members.

In fact, following Hiron's death in April last year, the general secretary is all the city unit committee now has.

In Kushtia, Sador Uddin and Asgor Ali were made president and general secretary of the district unit through a council in November last year.

The selection of the unit's two most important leaders aggrieved many in the grassroots and they announced a rebel committee, with Kushtia Municipality Mayor Anwar Ali and Kushtia-4 MP Abdur Rouf at the helm of it, the same day.

Both the committees, along with some more, are now awaiting party chief Sheikh Hasina's approval, according to AL sources.

IT'S ALL RIGHT

The central leaders of the AL claim whatever processes are being followed in the councils are "circumstantially right".

On re-election of old faces, an AL central committee member said many grassroots leaders have a tendency to cling to their posts till death.

"It is very difficult to elect new leadership under such circumstances. So, the party prefers selection to election in order to avoid any unwanted situation," he said, wishing anonymity.

AL Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif sees nothing wrong in the same faces being elected over and over again.

If any person gains the confidence of the party activists, he can be elected repeatedly, he said. "If old leaders are re-elected, then that will be the new