

PM defends connectivity

Says it will ensure development of South Asia, welfare of people

UNB, London

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said Bangladesh thinks about the welfare of its neighbours and urged all neighbouring nations to take a united stance against poverty as it the common enemy.

"Bangladesh wants to maintain good relations and strengthen connectivity with all of its neighbours taking the advantage of its geographical location in South Asia to ensure the development and welfare of all, including its own people," she said.

The PM made the comments while addressing a civic reception accorded to her by the UK chapter of Awami League for her outstanding achievements in different fields, particularly the implementation of the much-awaited Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) with India.

The programme was held at the Sheraton Park Lane Hotel in London on Sunday evening. PM's son and her ICT Adviser Sajeeb Wazed Joy and her niece Labour Party MP from Hampstead and Killbarn Tulip Siddiq were also present.

Hasina mentioned that Bangladesh and three other countries -- Bhutan, India and Nepal -- reached a consensus to boost connectivity in the region and a deal in this regard would be signed soon.

Besides, Hasina said, four countries -- Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar -- have undertaken a joint initiative titled "BCIM Economic Corridor" to ensure their economic development by boosting communications and connectivity.

About the country's gradual economic progress and remittance inflow,



she said Bangladesh's foreign currency now stands at US\$24 billion as the Bangladeshi expatriates are continuously sending money back home.

Hasina said she always got encouragement to construct the Padma Bridge with the country's own fund as the expatriates always assured her of all-out support to this end.

Turning to the LBA issue, the PM said the sufferings of enclave people would have removed and Indian parliament ratified it much earlier had Bangabandhu not been assassinated in 1975 as Bangladesh ratified it through the third amendment to the constitution on November 28 in 1974.

She said the subsequent governments of Zia, Ershad, Khaleda Zia and caretaker regimes did not have the courage to solve the problem.

Lambasting the BNP-Jamaat alliance for killing innocent people and vandalising vehicles during the hartal and blockade programme, Hasina said the mastermind of these barbaric acts now lives in London.

A number of British MPs, including Cardiff Central's Labour MP Jo Stevens, Ilford North's Labour MP Wes Streeting, Ilford South's Labour MP Mike Gapes and Sutton and Sutton & Cheam's Conservative MP Paul Scully, spoke at the function. They received bouquets and copies of "Unfinished Memoirs of Bangabandhu" from the PM.

Speaking at the programme, Tulip expressed her deep gratitude to the expatriate Bangladeshis. "You all blessed me and I could not have become a British MP without your support."



A boatmaker works on a new boat while the owner looks on. Workers remain busy making new boats for the rainy season. The photo was taken at Narapara village in Shariakandi upazila of Bogra yesterday -- the first day of Asharh that marks the beginning of the rainy season.

PHOTO: STAR

4 nations to get linked by road Girls under

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analysis of patterns of regional and international trade. The analysis was done by the Asian Development Bank, which has been pushing for regional connectivity for the past several years.

All the necessary protocols and agreements -- bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral -- and other prerequisites will be completed by December to introduce limited operation of vehicles through the available routes from early next year, said the statement.

"We have also discussed launching of a passenger bus service by the end of this year. We are planning to operate buses between Dhaka and Katmandu and Dhaka and Thimphu from November-December this year," Road Transport and Highways Division Secretary MAN Siddique told The Daily Star by phone from Thimphu.

Of the 30 corridors, seven are inside Bangladesh -- Dhaka-Chittagong and Dhaka-Sylhet highways, Joydevpur-Tangail-Hatikomrul and Hatikomrul-Rangpur roads, a road from Raroyherat to Ramgarh near the Feni river, the Padma bridge, and second bridges over Kanchpur and the Meghna and the Meghna-Gomti rivers.

The Jica is funding construction of the second Kanchpur, Meghna and Meghna-Gomti bridges. The ADB will finance for turning the Dhaka-Sylhet two-lane road into a four-lane one, Siddique said.

It would take five years for all the corridors to be fully ready, he added.

Upgrading of Dhaka-Chittagong highway is nearly done and the construction of Padma bridge and Joydevpur-Hatikomrul road is underway.

JOINT STATEMENT

The deal -- Motor Vehicles Agreement for the Regulation of Passenger, Personal and Cargo Vehicular Traffic Between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal (BBIN MVA) -- would bring

revolution in people-to-people contact, tourism, trade and investment among the four countries and in South Asia.

Bangladesh Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader, Bhutan Information and Communications Minister Lyonpo DN Dhunghyel, India Road Transport and Highways and Shipping Minister

in the BBIN region.... Let our borders be no longer treated as separators but as connectors."

Under the deal, any member nation will be allowed to use roads of other members to transport goods and passengers paying fees and charges to be fixed later.

"We recognise that our four countries comprise a dynamic sub-region, which requires efficient land transport connectivity between the concentrations of supply and demand, which are widely dispersed.

"We acknowledge that apart from physical infrastructure, the development of economic corridors within and between our countries requires the implementation of policy and regulatory measures, including the BBIN MVA, which will help address the nonphysical impediments to the seamless movement of goods vehicles and people between our four countries," reads the statement.

Key officials of relevant ministries and agencies in the respective countries are to mainstream the relevant provisions of the BBIN MVA, and subsequent legal instruments into their operations.

The ministers requested the ADB to continue the much-needed technical support and other assistance necessary to ensure implementation of the work plan.

"The finalisation of the BBIN MVA would allow us to move forward, in an accelerated fashion, with implementation of land transport facilitation arrangements between and among our countries," reads the deal.

Following the deal, a vehicle started from Thimphu to reach Kolkata through Guwahati-Shillong-Sylhet-Dhaka-Benapole. The trial run is aimed at monitoring the road condition.

Once fully operational, the entire sub-region will turn into a single market, experts say.

KEY POINTS

- Bilateral/trilateral/quadrilateral agreements/protocols by July
- Negotiation and approval of agreements/protocols by September
- Cross-border motor rally to see scope and opportunities in October
- Installation of prerequisites (IT systems, infrastructure, tracking, regulatory systems) by December

SOME PROBABLE ROUTES

- ROUTE 1: Kolkata-Petrapole/Benapole-Dhaka-Akhaura/Agartala (India-Bangladesh)
- ROUTE 2: Agartala-Akhaura-Chittagong (India-Bangladesh)
- ROUTE 3: Samdrup Jonkhar (Bhutan)-Guwahati-Shillong-Tamabil-Sylhet-Chittagong (India-Bangladesh-Bhutan)
- ROUTE 4: Kathmandu-Kakarvita/Phulbari-Banglabandha-Mongla/Chittagong (Nepal-India-Bangladesh)

Nitin Jairam Gadkari and Nepal Physical Infrastructure and Transport Minister Bimalendra Nidhi issued a joint statement after the signing of the deal.

Earlier in his opening remark, Obaidul said, "The signing of the agreement will be a landmark to open up enormous economic opportunities

Robber killed in 'shootout'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

An alleged leader of a robber gang was killed in a "gunfight" with Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) in Shrankhola range of Sundarbans in Bagerhat early yesterday.

The dead man, Jamal, 35, was the chief of gang, locally known as Jamal Bahini, Rab sources said.

The elite force recovered 14 local and foreign made firearms, eight sharp weapons and 100 cartridges from the spot.

Barisal Rab-8 deputy commander Major Adnan Kabir said a Rab team raided the area following secret information that gang members were preparing for a robbery.

When the Rab members entered the Katlar canal area at around 5:20 am and on sensing their presence robbers opened fire at the Rab team who also retaliated. The gun fight lasted till 5:50am.

After the gang members fled into the forest, Rab discovered Jamal's body and firearms from the spot.

Meanwhile in Satkhira district, three people who law enforcers claim are gang members sustained bullets in a shootout with police at Magura village under Tala upazila of the district early yesterday.

The injured Kalam Sheikh, 30, son of Sobhan Sheikh of Chandkathi village, Saddam Hossain, 22, son of Alauddin of Mithabari village and Zillur Rahman, 21, son of Jakir Hossain of Mousa village in Mohammadpur upazila of Magura were taken to Satkhira Sadar Hospital.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Tala Police Station Rezaul Islam said after obtaining a tip-off that a gang of robbers numbering around 10 to 12 were preparing for a robbery, a team of policemen raided the spot at Magura village at around 12:15am.

The robbers opened fire on the police and also hurled cocktails at them forcing the police to retaliate in fire. At one stage of the shootout, the robbers fled the scene leaving behind three men injured by fire. They were taken to the hospital.

OC Rezaul said injured robber Kalam Sheikh was the leader of the robbers. He is also an accused in at least nine other cases including seven with his police station.

Four police members, sub-inspector Pintu Lal Das, Akram Hossain and ASI Shahadatul Alam and constable Wahiduzzaman, were also injured in the shootout.

47 more back home

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nine from Sirajganj, six from Jhenaidah, two each from Narsingdi, Mymensingh, Meherpur and Cox's Bazar, and one each from Tangail, Faridpur, Shariatpur, Madaripur and Bogra districts, said a press release of Bangladesh Embassy in Bangkok.

"Our government paid their airfares and repatriation cost," said Saida Muna Tasneem, Bangladesh ambassa-

dor in Bangkok.

"We are working closely with the Thai authorities to ensure repatriation of 197 more Bangladeshis by the end of June," she added.

The embassy has so far repatriated 872 Bangladeshis, who had been trafficked into Thailand since the end of 2013.

It also sent back 33 Bangladeshis after mass graves were discovered

along the Thai-Malaysia border at the beginning of last month.

The ambassador visited Thailand's Songkhla province for the second time on June 10 and interviewed 117 self-claimed Bangladeshis, most of whom were rescued recently.

The embassy will continue to interview 203 remaining self-claimed Bangladeshis in Thailand for their early repatriation, Tasneem said.

DB now waits

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evidence," he added. For ballistic test, investigators sent the bullets to the CID on May 28 and the pistol on June 6.

Monirul, joint commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP), also said once they receive the ballistic report, the investigators might seek fresh remand of Bakhtiar.

On Sunday, DB officials seized the black Prado car, believed to be owned by Bakhtiar's mother Pinu Khan, a lawmaker and general secretary of Mahila Awami League, from the flat allocated to her as an MP.

Monirul said they have scrutinised CCTV footage from roadside cameras and become sure that the black car was on the spot during the incident.

Investigators have also found out that apart from the driver and Bakhtiar, two more people were inside the car at that time. The two have been identified, he added.



BAKHTIAR ALAM

Arrested on May 31, Bakhtiar told investigators that he had gone to a local bar in the evening of April 13 and a party at Sonargaon Hotel later that night, said DB officials.

Returning drunk from Sonargaon around 1:30am, he was "feeling suffocated" inside the car stuck in a traffic jam near Dilu Road, investigators quoted him as saying. Lowering the window, he fired four to five times.

One of the victims, rickshaw-puller Abdul Hakim, was hit by bullet in the abdomen. The bullet was removed at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, according to family and hospital sources.

Hakim died 16 hours after the shooting.

Auto-rickshaw driver Yakub Ali too was hit once, in the right part of his chest. The bullet was pulled out from the body during autopsy at Dhaka Medical College morgue.

Yakub died on April 23.

CROSS-BORDER RAID

After boasts, India tries to assuage Myanmar

THE EXPRESS TRIBUNE, New Delhi

India is sending its national security adviser to Myanmar to calm tempers over a rare cross-raid against insurgents that it trumpeted as a warning to countries harbouring anti-India militants.

Days after Indian Special Forces crossed into Myanmar from two north-eastern states to hunt down militants who had killed 18 soldiers in an ambush, it turns out that the operation was minor and only low-level rebels were targeted.

But Indian ministers portrayed the military action -- which was meant to be covert -- as a major success and a declaration that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was ready to carry out surgical strikes against militants beyond India's borders.

Myanmar broke its silence over the operation after the chest-thumping,

saying no fighting had taken place on its soil and military experts in New Delhi said it would be harder to get Myanmar's support for further counter-insurgency actions.

National Security Adviser Ajit Kumar Doval, who was a key player in the June 9 operation against two rebel camps in Myanmar, will meet government leaders in Myanmar during a two-day trip starting today, officials said.

"Damage limitation will be an overwhelming component of this visit after the embarrassment that has been caused to Myanmar by the intemperate statements from our ministers," said Ajai Sahni, executive director of the Institute of Conflict Management that tracks militant activity across South Asia.

India's mountainous northeast bounded by China, Myanmar,

Bangladesh and Bhutan is home to dozens of insurgent groups, some fighting for greater autonomy and others for secession.

India's army said it inflicted significant casualties during the pre-dawn raid last week. But intelligence assessments have since revealed that one of the camps was empty when the commandos struck.

Only seven bodies had been recovered, the Indian Express said, quoting assessments conducted by the army with the intelligence services. Wireless intercepts suggested fewer than a dozen rebels were wounded.

"This was a relatively minor operation and will have only transient tactical and psychological significance. Operationally and logistically, the Myanmar attack was unexceptional," Sahni said.

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of them were raped on their ways to and from school. In many of these cases, the rapists attacked the girls walking unescorted.

Absence of parents at home can also make these girls victims to rape. Twenty-two percent of these girls have been violated when they were left alone at their homes.

LURED TO BE RAPED

A common trick is to lure younger victims with chocolates, candy, toys, books and similar stuffs. Teenage girls, on the other hand, are mostly lured with promises of jobs and romantic relationships.

MOST RAPISTS KNOWN TO VICTIMS

The study also discovered that 45 percent of the rapists are neighbours or men who live in the same locality as the victims. These men are mostly known to the victims.

Rape by romantic partners made up 11 percent of the cases of rapes and seven percent of the rapists have been teachers or private tutors.

Of the victims, 33 percent were taken to a field or an orchard and raped. And, 30 percent were raped at the rapists' houses, according to the study.

Khaleda's change

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vehicles would run on Bangladesh roads without paying duty and this cannot be friendship. We, however, could not overlook the fact that her claim is distorted as Indian vehicles will be subjected to tariff according to the WTO rules.

She also fired her favourite "slavery" salvo when she said "friendship is good, but no one wants to make any friendship sacrificing one's own interests. It is friendship when it ensures equality, otherwise it becomes slavery".

Khaleda and her party had often played up this propaganda by alleging that the Awami League wants to make the country a "slave" of India.

Khaleda did not discuss things with any of her top leaders before making such a definitive comment.

"She did not talk to me or any of our senior leaders," said a standing committee member of the party. "I know of one standing committee member who was surprised after reading her statement in newspapers. We are really baffled about her stance on India before and during Modi's visit and now."

Another standing committee member said Khaleda should have consulted her senior party members before making such a policy statement, especially when she had earlier claimed the BNP is not an anti-India party.

Talking to The Daily Star, Sabihuddin Ahmed, adviser to the BNP chief, said, "The BNP chairperson made the statement keeping in view the country's interest. Our politics is not against India."

Another BNP leader said Khaleda suddenly realised that by being friendly towards India she had lost the anti-Indian support of her voters and so quickly tried to recoup the lost ground.

Another source said she changed her mind on India as she thought her conversation with Modi was deliberately leaked to the media.

Netherlands

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sanction is appropriate".

It came after Chief Inspector of Prisons Nick Hardwick said the rising pressure on prisons from budget cuts and increasing numbers cannot go on indefinitely.