

Bangladesh unstoppable

Conspiracy cannot hold back progress, PM tells reception in Dutch capital

UNB, The Hague

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said Bangladesh is now unstoppable in its development drive.

"Bangladesh is becoming an indomitable power. Its ongoing development can't be stopped by plotting any conspiracy or carrying out destructive activities. Bangladesh will be a middle-income country much before 2021 by eradicating hunger and poverty," she told a reception in The Hague on Thursday night.

Members of the Bangladeshi community in the Dutch capital accorded the reception to her at a local hotel.

Referring to the political situation in Bangladesh after the 1/11 change-over in 2007, Hasina said the then caretaker government denied her entry to the country from London.

"At that time some expatriate Bangladeshis came forward, putting their lives at risk, and accompanied me to Bangladesh."

Terming the Netherlands a good friend of Bangladesh, the premier said the country had been always beside Bangladesh during its needs.

Bangladesh, she said, would have been a developed nation long ago had Bangabandhu been alive.

"Bangabandhu during his three-and-a-half-year tenure in power had completed most of the tasks for cementing the foundation of an independent and sovereign state."

The PM blasted the BNP-Jamaat government for scrapping a deal with a Dutch company to procure computers for public offices. The then AL government (1996-2001) had entered a deal with the Dutch computer manufacturer Tulip Computers NV to purchase computers.

As the "Tulip" coincided with the name of Tulip Siddiqui, one of the nieces of Hasina, the subsequent BNP government scrapped the deal on the excuse that the Tulip Computer NV was owned by Tulip Siddiqui, now a member of British parliament.

She urged the expatriates and foreign entrepreneurs to invest in Bangladesh.

State Minister for Water Resources Nazrul Islam and AL leaders from the UK and the Netherlands spoke, among others.

Do not pass

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civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that these organizations seek to promote and protect," he stressed.

The Special Rapporteur noted that the proposed law would make it compulsory for NGOs seeking to receive foreign funds to register with the Government-controlled Non-Governmental Organisations Affairs Bureau, and obtain its approval for each project undertaken with these resources.

The Bureau's commissioners would also review on a monthly basis the progress made by NGOs in the implementation of their projects. The Bureau would also have the authority to approve appointment of foreign specialists under foreign-funded projects, as well as all travel abroad paid for by foreign funding.

Failure to comply with these provisions could lead to the cancellation or suspension of an NGO's registration, the interruption of the project, and a fine up to three times the amount of the foreign funding received.

"Such governmental intrusion is totally unacceptable. The ability to seek, secure and use resources is essential to the very existence and effective operations of any civil society organization," said Mr. Kiai.

1st ODI today

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the tools in their locker to put the visitors to the sword.

As usual, facing the hosts' slow bowlers, including Shakib Al Hasan, will be the biggest challenge for the visiting batsmen. The Zimbabweans will also have to deal with left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman, whose cutters have flummoxed many a better batsman in the Indian and South African camps.

Bangladesh may play with three pacers and a specialist spinner in Arafat Sunny, alongside seven batsmen. Pacer Al-Amin Hossain has a good chance of returning to international cricket unless coach Chandika Hathurusingha continues his tendency of giving surprise call-ups by naming uncapped pacer Kamrul Islam Rabbi in the eleven. The biggest surprise, though, could be the inclusion of Jubair Hossain -- who looked rather biteless in Fatullah -- especially if he is drafted in at the expense of Sunny.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses a reception accorded to her by the expatriate Bangladeshis at The Hague on her receiving "Champions of the Earth" and "ITU" awards. The reception was organised yesterday by the Netherlands chapter of Awami League.

PHOTO: PMO

Human traffickers find new route

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home before a local manpower broker in mid-March lured him with promises of a concierge's job in Sicily, Italy, through legal channels.

The broker, Sazzadul Islam Musa of Dinjapur's Phulbari upazila, demanded Tk 7 lakh in exchange. Mamun agreed.

"I paid the money in instalments. I had to sell a piece of land and take loans from others to arrange the money," he says. "Musa also took my hand-written private citizen passport, saying he needed it for visa processing."

The syndicate members in collusion with corrupt officials at the Agargaon passport office in Dhaka obtained an official passport in which Mamun was shown as a senior accounts officer of the National University. This was done without his knowledge, he claimed.

In the first week of April, Mamun along with Taufiqul Islam Jewel, another fortune-seeker from Dinajpur, came to Dhaka. Thus began their journey into a nightmare.

The traffickers had told them they would be boarding a plane to Italy in a few days. They were first kept at a flat in Mohammadpur for 20 days before

being taken to a dingy hotel in Fakirapool.

Two days later, a man named Mahub came to them with bus tickets and told him that they would take the land route to India first.

"Initially, I refused. But when I thought of the money I had already spent, I agreed," said Mamun.

They were taken to Kolkata and then to Mumbai from where they were flown to Istanbul towards the end of April.

All the way, they were guided by a trafficker named Al Amin who kept their passports and other documents with him.

Inside the confinement in Istanbul, Mamun spent weeks waiting for his plane ticket to Italy. Every time he asked someone from the syndicate about the ticket, he received the same answer: The journey was being delayed due to a problem in flight schedule.

Tired of waiting, the 32-year old at one stage insisted that he wanted to talk to his family. The traffickers allowed him to call the family, but it had to be in their presence so that Mamun could not reveal the truth.

"After about two weeks, somebody

named Nazrul came and told me to start working at a nearby rod factory."

Mamun, a postgraduate, refused to work in Turkey. But many others, he said, had no alternatives.

Just when Mamun was on the verge of giving up all hopes, a syndicate member, to his surprise, returned him both the passports -- the original one and the official one obtained through fake documents. Jewel too got his passports back.

The two immediately went to the Bangladesh Embassy in Istanbul and told their stories to the officials, who seized their passports and sent them home with travel permits in mid-July.

Though Mamun and Jewel were saved from being trafficked, several hundred Bangladeshis, according to an investigation of the Department of Immigration and Passports (DIP), had already been smuggled to different countries, including Brazil, via Turkey with official passports.

Shahidul of Comilla is one of them. He was sent to Dubai in May, also using an official passport issued against forged papers, the DIP probe in July found.

Investigators said the syndicate that

tried to traffic Mamun and Jewel had been active for years and had members, including some women, in 18 countries.

"The syndicate members work in small groups. They lure people, obtain fake passports and forge visas to traffic people," said Lt Col Khandaker Golam Sarwar, commanding officer of Rapid Action Battalion-3. His unit is probing several trafficking cases.

A large gang comprising passport officials and staffs, brokers and travel agents has so far had at least 2,000 official passports issued against fake documents, the DIP investigation revealed.

The syndicate usually takes Tk 7-10 lakh for each passport, according to a DIP official.

An official and three staffs of the passport office were suspended in May for forging official passports and assisting human traffickers.

Rab-3 officials recently said at least 43 women and seven men were trafficked to war-ravaged Syria in the past few months. The women were supposed to be sent to Lebanon as domestic workers. It is not clear whether they were sent on forged passports.

14kg gold seized at Dhaka airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials yesterday recovered 120 gold bars, weighing around 14 kilograms, from an aircraft coming from Malaysia at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital.

The flight of Regent Airways landed at the airport from Kuala Lumpur around 8:15am and the bars, worth around Tk 7.5 crore, were found in an abandoned condition under a seat after all passengers disembarked, said Shahiduzaman Sarkar, assistant commissioner of customs, who led the drive.

He told The Daily Star that on information, they searched suspected passengers after they got off the aircraft.

"Getting no gold from them, we carried out a search inside the airliner and seized the bars wrapped in black scotch tape," he said.

Shahiduzaman believed that it was the cabin crew who were behind the gold smuggling as concealing gold in such a way was quite impossible for a passenger.

After the passengers' disembarkation from the aircraft, the gold could have been taken out of the airliner by some dishonest security men of the civil aviation authorities, he said.

The customs official added that they got some names of the dishonest security men.

No one was detained in connection with the gold seizure.

Customs officials seized the aircraft for carrying the gold.

Taiwanese

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that the Taiwanese couple was hurt because they had tried to prevent the burglars from taking away Tk 6 lakh.

They said they had already arrested Jahangir, one of the three culprits, in Joydevpur area of Gazipur.

He had worn a mask while entering the house because he was a familiar face to the victims, said Officer-in-Charge Abu Bakar Miah of Uttara-East Police Station, quoting the detainee.

The other two were Jahangir's brothers-in-law and as off 11:00pm, they were absconding with the money, the OC added.

Bidhan Tripura, deputy commissioner (Uttara Division) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police, said the three criminals used to work at a PVC door factory owned by Ming.

They later started working as subcontractors and frequently visited Ming's office, just a floor down from his residence in the four-storey building in Uttara Sector-4.

The DC claimed that the trio went there around 12:30am and opened the collapsible gate of the building with a duplicate key, knowing very well that Ming had withdrawn Tk 6 lakh from a bank on Thursday.

Seeing the couple still awake, the criminals hit them with a solid object on their heads, and fled with the money, the DC added.

Ctg reels

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Sultana Kabir, a resident of Shulak Bahar, said they had been buying breakfast and lunch from restaurants for a week. "It [gas supply] comes after 10:00pm with a very little flow and then I can prepare our dinner," she added.

Many residents are forced to use electric cookers and other alternatives.

The most affected areas are Bakalia, Shulak Bahar, Bahaddarhat, Kapasgola, Badurtala, Dewan Bazar, Chandanpura, Sub Area, Rahamatganj, Dewanji Pukur Par, Jamal Khan, Katalganj, Chawk Bazar, Ghat Farhadbegh and Anderkillia.

The KDGCL officials said they were trying hard to improve the situation.

"We have received thousands of complaints since Sunday and we are working to improve the situation," said Azizul Haque, deputy general manager (distribution) of KDGCL.

The situation has worsened due to a recent increase in demand upstream in the Grid and Chittagong gets low supply as it is in downstream, he added.

"Moreover, gas is being supplied to Meghna Power Station through a parallel line with Chittagong, resulting in less supply to the port city," he said.

"Although the demand of gas in Chittagong is more than 400 MMCFD, the city gets 280 MMCFD to 290 MMCFD on average," he said, adding, "Supply of gas from the National Grid has been reduced by more than 50 MMCFD recently."

"We have stopped supply of gas to Shikalbaha Power Plant and started rationing supply to Rawzan Thermal Power Plant in a bid to improve the situation," he said.

"As demand for power reduces in winter, we are considering reducing supply to the power stations," he said, adding, "We hope the situation will improve very soon."



Sunidhi Chauhan received the warmest of welcomes from her Bangladeshi fans, as she performed live in Winter Blast 2015 Dhaka with Habib Wahid and Rakesh Maini at Naboratri Hall of Bashundhara International Convention City yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Where babies safe without mothers

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had to join work when the baby was little over a month.

"At first I tried to leave her with my mother-in-law but she used to cry a lot. Then I tried visiting her at home in Savar during lunch hours but then there was always the fear of getting late for work."

The only solution appeared to her was bringing the baby with her to work and in that case she could even breastfeed the baby from time to time.

"Now I can see her anytime I want with the permission of my supervisor and work without anxiety," Shikha said.

Finery Limited in the capital's Mirpur explained how it and its female employees are equally benefitted from its day-care centre.

More than half of the company's machine operators are female, who used to remain absent from work on many occasions when they had none to look after their babies at home, said Alauddin Azad, manager of the readymade garment.

The number of absentees came down sharply after it set up a crèche in 2004

with the capacity of 20 children between 0-3 years, he said, adding that an in-house medical centre worked as an extra-motivation for mothers who could consult a doctor immediately when required.

"The benefit we get in return as employers is immense. Employees tend to become loyal to the company," said Dipak Kumar Dey, deputy manager (welfare) of the factory.

Sheepa Hafiza, director (gender, justice and diversity), migration programme of Brac, also elaborated on how day-care centres for children help companies retain qualified female employees.

The organisation allocated three floors of a rented quarter inside its Mohakhali head office premises for a crèche.

Each floor accommodates 20 children from the age of 0 to 5 years, who spent time there in the care of 18 women and a supervisor.

"We started thinking about it since 1997-98. Initially it was difficult to convince both working parents and the management of the benefits of keeping

young children near mothers," Sheepa said.

Such arrangements enhance the concentration of female employees, as they feel more relaxed at work, she said, adding Brac was considering expanding the facility.

Private organisations including Brac Bank, Grameen Phone, Robi and Bangla Link have day-care centres at their head offices. Bangladesh Bank was the pioneer in this area in the banking sector.

There are only 11 government-run day-care centres under Jatiya Mohila Sangstha across Bangladesh while 43 under the women's affairs department, said Md Sattar Mollah, deputy director (day care) of the department.

Bangladesh Labour Law 2006 (amended in 2013) makes it mandatory for every organisation with 40 or more female workers to have one or more rooms to keep children below six years when mothers are away for work. It also specifies details of all the amenities crèches must have along with trained and experienced female caregivers.

However, the implementation of the law is rare.

Suraiya Haque, executive director of Phulki that has been running day-care centres in the country since 1991, said, "Though there are rooms designated as day-care centres in most garment factories out of some 5,000 in the country, in most cases those are just empty spaces with no facilities or caregivers and without clean hygienic atmosphere."

At times of inspection, organisations show the rooms only to claim that they comply with the labour law, she added.

Giving examples of the west, Suraiya emphasised the importance of day-care centres in communities.

Phulki runs 40 community-based day-care and development centres for children aged between 2 and 6 years with the help of Unicef and other social organisations.

Brac has 17 similar establishments in the slums of Dhaka, said Sheepa.

Both Brac and Phulki provide consultation to organisations willing to set up their own crèches. The latter also provides training.