

Education, IT could be jointly explored

Bulgarian president tells the Bangladesh premier in Sofia

UNB, Sofia, Bulgaria



Mentioning that a meaningful cooperation is possible with Bangladesh in many sectors, Bulgarian President Rosen Plevneliev has said both his country and Bangladesh could jointly explore prospects in the fields of education, IT and other sectors.

"We could jointly explore cooperation in the fields of education, IT and other sectors," Plevneliev told Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina when she met him at the Bulgarian presidency building on Wednesday afternoon.

He also described Hasina as the great leader of the people of the world at large.

Earlier, the Bulgarian president and the PM also had an exclusive meeting. Briefing reporters after the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim said the Bulgarian president going beyond the standard protocol received the prime minister in the corridor of the Presidency building.

Plevneliev was assisted by two of his advisers on foreign policy and the Bulgarian non-resident ambassador to Bangladesh during the meeting.

Praising Hasina's leadership, the Bulgarian president appreciated the rapid economic development of Bangladesh over the last few years.

"Many nations could learn from Bangladesh," he was quoted as saying.

Plevneliev said Bulgaria was also doing well in the context of Europe.

Responding to the Prime Minister's call for recruiting skilled manpower from Bangladesh, he said they usually provide "blue card" for the fourth migrant workers for a shorter period in their country without elaborating further on the issue.

Expressing her gratitude for the support that Bulgaria had provided during the Liberation War in 1971, Hasina said, "Bulgaria has a special place in our hearts."

She recalled that Bulgaria was the fourth country in the world and the second in Europe to recognise Bangladesh after the Liberation War.

The PM also emphasised that Bangladesh from now on could forge cooperation with Bulgaria in sectors like agriculture, ICT and tourism. Bangladesh also wants to share its experience with Bulgaria in various socio-economic fields, she added.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, State Minister for Women and Children Affairs Meher Afroze Chumki and Bangladesh Ambassador to Bulgaria M Allama Siddiki were present, among others.

Shibir leader dies

FROM PAGE 20

medicines in time. I am not sure whether he got that in jail."

Their mother Halima Begum alleged that her son had been tortured in police custody.

However, Rajshahi Metropolitan Police (RMP) Commissioner Md Shamsuddin rejected outright the allegation.

Hafizur was arrested a day into the murder of Prof Rezaul of RU English Department in Shalbagan area of Rajshahi city on April 23. The teacher was killed in an attack that bore the hallmark of the previous murders of bloggers in the country.

The Shibir leader was placed on a four-day remand and sent to Rajshahi Central Jail on its completion.

Days later, he was admitted to the jail hospital and was shifted to the RMCH on May 17 on doctors' recommendations, said Shafiqul Islam Khan, senior superintendent at the jail.

Hafizur's body was handed over to his family after its autopsy at the RMC morgue.

On May 17, RMP Commissioner Md Shamsuddin said four operatives of banned militant outfit Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) took part in the killing of Prof Rezaul.

Of the four, Maskawat Hasan alias Sakib alias Abdullah was arrested in Gaibandha. The three other killers who were directly involved in the attack were yet to be arrested, he said at a press conference at the RMP headquarters.

Police had earlier arrested three more people, including Hafizur, in connection with the case. The other two -- Raihan Ali, imam of Prof Rezaul's village (Dorgamaria) mosque, and another Shibir leader Khairul Islam -- are behind bars.

200 families live in fear of landslides

Local administration asks them to take shelter in safer places

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Around 200 families living in the hilly areas in two villages of Juri upazila are passing their days in fear of landslides as the villages were hit by a landslide on Wednesday.

The upazila administration yesterday asked the villagers to take shelter in safer places within 24 hours.

Water level in the Juri river has risen due to continuous onrush of water from the upstream and flooded large areas in the upazila, affecting around 2,000 families.

Besides, it has been raining for the last three-four days.

At least six people of a family were injured and 50 houses damaged in a landslide in Montoil and Gushogram villages on Wednesday, said Masum Reza, chairman of Joyfornagor union.

Anwara Begum, 50, who lives on a hill slope at Montoil village, said they were in fear as landslides might occur anytime.

"Flood water has damaged 11 dykes, washed away fish of around 700 ponds and damaged paddy on 2,000 hectares of land in my union," said Sahab Uddin, chairman of Gualbari union.

Nasir Ullah, Juri upazila nirbahi officer, said he visited the area to see the situation.

Abdul Karim Kim, general secretary of Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon (Bapa) Sylhet unit, said they had long

been campaigning against the destruction of hills. But hill cutting went unabated, causing the landslide.

Kishore Roy Chowdhury, Juri upazila vice-chairman, said though the flood-affected people took shelter on nearby embankments and other safer places, they were passing their days amid hardship for want of drinking water and food.

He said flood situation also worsened. Road communications between the upazila and other areas of the district remained snapped as many roads and bridges went under water.

Gulshanara Chowdhury, Juri upazila chairman, said they distributed relief materials in the affected areas.



A hillock in Montoil village of Juri upazila in Moulvibazar. Several dozens of families in the village are passing their days in fear of landslides due to a flood triggered by rain and the onrush of water from the upstream. The photo was taken recently. PHOTO: STAR

Digital noose to be tightened further

FROM PAGE 1

drafted to check distortion and denial of established historical facts related to the war.

Several provisions of the proposed Digital Security Act are similar to those in the ICT law and the proposed Liberation War Crimes Denial Act, with differences only in the degree of punishment.

The Penal Code too provides for punishment for hurting someone's religious sentiment or defaming anyone, lawyers say.

Talking to The Daily Star, Law Minister Anisul Huq explained the rationale for enacting the digital security act.

"Cyber crimes now have become a global threat. We need a modern law to combat them. We feel the necessity of enacting a new law even more now after the Bangladesh Bank heist," he said.

Experts, however, say having different punishments for similar offences under different laws would create problem in enforcement of the laws.

"Besides, several sections in the digital security act contain vague wordings, leaving room for misuse or misinterpretation," Jyotirmoy Barua, a Supreme Court lawyer who works on human rights, told The Daily Star.

According to section 57(1) of the ICT Act, "If any person deliberately publishes or transmits or causes to be published or transmitted in the website or in electronic form any material which is fake and obscene or its effect is such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it, or causes to deteriorate or creates possibility to deteriorate law and order, prejudice the image of the State or person or causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief or instigate against any person or organisation, then this activity of his will be regarded as an offence."

For this offence, the maximum punishment is 14 years' imprisonment.

Rights activists have been pressing for the repeal of section 57 and their demand has grown louder after last year's arrest of senior journalist Probr Sikdar under the provision.

But the law minister said the section will remain, even after the enactment of the digital security law.

However, the draft of digital security act says a person may face a maximum sentence of two years in jail or Tk 2 lakh fine or both if he or she is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something false or obscene and something that pollutes human mind, defames someone and hurts religious sentiment of someone.

Nur Khan Liton, acting executive director of rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, said instead of repealing section 57 despite public outcry, the government is going to formulate a new law that has a similar section. "The space for discussion will shrink because of such attitude of the government," he added.

After preparing the draft of the Liberation War Denial Crimes Act-2016, Bangladesh Law Commission handed it over to the law ministry on March 22 for the next course of action.

The proposed legislation says the distortion or denial, by any means, of

any of the events that took place between March 1 and December 16, 1971, will be an offence and one may face a maximum sentence of five years' imprisonment for the offence. In addition to jail term, one may be fined up to Tk 1 crore.

Yet, the draft of the digital security law proposes punishment up to life imprisonment or a fine of Tk 1 crore or both if anyone through any electronic device spreads negative propaganda against the Father of the Nation or the Liberation War or the spirit of the war or war-related issues settled by the court. There will be the same punishment for helping anyone commit the offence.

Jyotirmoy Barua said it's like imposing a "blanket ban" and such a law will ultimately stop constructive discussion, going against article 39 of the constitution, which guarantees a citizen's right to freedom of speech and expression.

Nur Khan said, "If the government passes the [digital security] law, people might see it as a weapon to suppress dissenting views."

SOME OTHER PROVISIONS

According to the draft of the Digital Security Act, the government will form a Digital Security Agency under ICT Division to ensure national digital security. A director general will lead the agency.

To discuss the overall digital security of the country and to take "nationally important decision" over the issue, there will be a National Digital Security Council headed by the prime minister, the draft reads.

The director general of the Digital Security Agency, through gazette notification, will declare some specific computer systems, networks and information infrastructures, which are related to national security and people's economic and social welfare, as "Essential Information Infrastructures".

"If someone commits any offence against the Essential Information Infrastructures, then he or she has to face maximum 14 years and minimum two years in jail or maximum fine of Tk 1 crore or both."

A person may face highest five years in jail or Tk 3 lakh fine or both if he/she deliberately commits digital forgery or gets involved in "computer-related cheating", the draft said.

It would be an offence if someone enters or intends to enter or block and harms or intends to harm someone's computer or computer programme or system or network or digital device to endanger the integrity, public security and sovereignty of the county or creates panic to prevent the government or a company or an individual from discharging their duties.

One may face highest 14 years' imprisonment or Tk 1 crore fine or both for the offences, reads the draft.

If someone produces or publishes or stores or distributes pornography using computer or computer programme or digital system or network, he or she may face highest seven years jail or Tk 5 lakh fine or both. In case of child pornography, the punishment will be maximum 10 years in jail or Tk 10 lakh fine or both.

All crimes under the law will be bailable and law enforcers will need a warrant before searching or confiscat-

EXISTING ARTICLE/LAWS

ARTICLE 39 OF THE CONSTITUTION

(1) Freedom of thought and conscience is guaranteed.

(2) Subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by law in the interests of the security of the State, friendly relations with foreign states, public order, decency or morality, or in relation to contempt of court, defamation or incitement to an offence -- (a) the right of every citizen to freedom of speech and expression and (b) freedom of the press are guaranteed.

SECTION 57 OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY ACT

If any person deliberately publishes or transmits or causes to be published or transmitted in the website or in electronic form any material which is fake and obscene or its effect is such as to tend to deprave and corrupt persons who are likely, having regard to all relevant circumstances, to read, see or hear the matter contained or embodied in it, or causes to deteriorate or creates possibility to deteriorate law and order, prejudice the image of the state or person or causes to hurt or may hurt religious belief or instigate against any person or organisation, then this activity of his will be regarded as an offence. **Maximum 14 years' jail**

PENAL CODE

295A. Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of the citizens of Bangladesh, by words, either spoken or written, or by visible representations insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to **two years, or with fine, or with both.**

501. Whoever prints or engraves any matter, knowing or having good reason to believe that such matter is defamatory of any person, shall be punished with simple imprisonment for a term which may extend to **two years, or with fine, or with both.**

PROPOSED LAWS

SECTION 15(5) OF DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

If anyone through any electronic device spreads negative propaganda against the Father of the Nation or the Liberation War or the spirit of the war or war-related issues settled by the court would be counted as offences. **Maximum Life Imprisonment**

SECTION 19 (2)(3) OF DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

If anyone is found to have deliberately published or broadcast something false or obscene and something that pollutes human mind, defames someone and hurts religious sentiment of someone will be considered as offence. **Maximum 2 years' jail**

LIBERATION WAR CRIMES DENIAL ACT

Distortion or denial, by any means, of any of the events that took place between March 1 and December 16, 1971, will be an offence. **Maximum 5 years' jail**

ing any electronic devices.

But, in special cases, law enforcers can search, confiscate or even arrest someone without a warrant in presence of an executive magistrate, it said.

If anyone commits these offences inside Bangladesh through computer devices, network or system from abroad, he or she will be punished under this law. Similarly, it will be punishable if anyone commits these crimes abroad from inside the country.

Govt blocks

FROM PAGE 1

were being used by extremists in their networking.

The telecom watchdog had asked all international internet gateway (IIG) operators to block some URLs that link to Somewherein, Muktomona, Nagorik and Nobojug blogs earlier this month, said a source at the BTRC.

On May 5, the BTRC also directed the IIGs to block some Facebook posts of five individuals, terming them "malice to Islam".

BTRC Chairman Shahjahan Mahmood said the regulator issued the instruction after getting requests from the law enforcement agencies and the home ministry.

"We never go for any blocking on our own. But the BTRC sometimes complies with some requests of different agencies to maintain law and order," he said. Set up a decade ago, Somewherein is the most popular blog in the country.

Arild Klokkerhaug, founder of Somewherein Net Ltd, said they have got complaints from the users that they could not access the site since May 4.

A day later, an internet service provider confirmed that it had blocked Somewherein domain upon orders from the BTRC.

"Some IIGs have blocked our full domain, or blocked IP related to our server. Some 20 percent of our users have lost access to somewhereinblog.net," said Klokkerhaug in an e-mail response to The Daily Star.

At present Somewherein has daily hits between 45,000 and 50,000. It used to be around 60,000 earlier.

Klokkerhaug said they have contacted the telecom regulator several times on this issue but have failed to get any official response.

A BTRC official said intelligence officials cannot decode messages sent using Threema or Wickr and the services do not allow third parties to hack or unveil the encrypted messages.

"That's why intelligence agencies requested the BTRC to block it immediately," said the official.

Threema was rolled out in June last year globally and in Bangladesh a few months ago. Currently, it has more than three million users but there is no information about Bangladesh market, said officials.

Wickr, an encrypted messenger with which pictures and audio-videos also could be shared, was launched internationally in 2012.

The BTRC chairman said even though they have ordered the blocking of Threema and Wickr but the technology of the IIG operating in Bangladesh was unable to block one of the messengers. He did not mention which one.

In November last year, the government had blocked social media sites Facebook and online messaging and calling services WhatsApp, Viber with some other services for 22 days after the Supreme Court had upheld the death penalty for war criminals Salauddin Quader Chowdhury and Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed.

The government had also blocked YouTube for about a year in 2012.

New BJP wave

FROM PAGE 1

His announcement reflected the views of the BJP leaders who while campaigning had claimed millions of Muslim immigrants from neighbouring Bangladesh will be stripped of their right to vote.

By raising the issue, they tried to exploit Assam's Hindu sentiments who alleged that they had lost jobs and government benefits and welfare schemes to those who've crossed over.

Therefore, the win of the BJP in Assam may have an implication for Bangladesh and the announcement of the would-be chief minister indicated it.

Such a situation never happened in the last 15 years when the Congress was in power in Assam.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, however, termed his BJP's victory in Assam "exceptional, historic by all standards and phenomenal".

His reactions say he was in a jubilant mood, after counting of votes showed BJP was set to comfortably win. Modi did not waste time to be on Twitter before noon to congratulate BJP leaders in Assam.

This may surprise someone as to why Modi appeared so jubilant after a win in a state-level election.

The records, however, tell the story. Just five years ago, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had won only five out of 126 seats in the state election of Assam. In this election, it won 86 seats, well past the 64 needed to form a state government.

This win now empowers the BJP to form the government along with polls partners ACP, first time in the history of Assam.

This win, according to political analysts in India, will open windows for BJP to expand its political influence in the northeast and beyond its traditional strongholds in the northern and western parts of India.

Political analysts pointed out that this win was sort of a repeat of the BJP's 2014 Lok Sabha elections when the party had managed to win seven out of the 14 seats in Assam raising a hope of capturing the seat of power in the assembly polls.

That happened because of the Modi wave that swept the country.

But the Modi wave could not prevent the BJP's debacle in Delhi and Bihar elections last year. The humiliating defeat generated scepticism that the charisma of Modi was waning.

The BJP had changed its strategy to win Assam.

This is also the first time in Assam politics when the BJP had announced its own chief minister candidate, union minister Sonowal, to fight three-time chief minister and Congress leader Tarun Gogoi.

According to political analyst Ashok Malik, the BJP did not over-invest the PM's political capital. Modi travelled to Assam only three times to address public meetings.

"It focused on local leaders, themes and issues. The bombast and rhetoric of Bihar, the playing up of so-called national controversies, was avoided," Malik, a senior fellow of Observer Research Foundation, wrote for NDTV yesterday.

"It was a tightly-controlled campaign that did not allow the Congress to divert attention from the debate on local governance and bring in extrane-

ous concerns, as the JD (U)-BJD alliance managed to do so successfully in Bihar."

There is more good news for the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) as it opened its account in Kerala and increased its tally in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where the party had marginal presence in the state politics.

Drum beats of the celebration in the BJP camp may be painful for the Congress as it has become the biggest loser in the state-level elections.

"The Congress suffered huge setbacks in the five states where results of the assembly elections are being announced on Thursday," said The Hindu in a report.

"It lost Assam to the BJP for huge margins, while the Left Front trounced the Congress-led UDF in Kerala," said The Hindu.

Congress could not do well in Tamil Nadu. Its alliance with the DMK did not make any major impact and the AIADMK-led by Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa is to retain the power in the state.

In Tamil Nadu and West Bengal, the partnerships that were struck in desperation produced no joy for the Congress, commended NDTV.

"Its odd coupling with the Left in Bengal, whom it fought against in Kerala, was thoroughly rebuffed."

In Tamil Nadu, the alliance with the DMK failed to evict J Jayalalithaa as Chief Minister, though the state has a 32-year-record in not re-electing a government for a consecutive term.

The loss in Kerala, which saw habitually between the Congress-led coalition and the Left Front, may have been foreseen; but the scale of the defeat, with several Congress ministers losing their constituencies, somewhat breaks the mould in the coastal state, said NDTV.

In West Bengal too, the party's experiment to form an alliance with the Left was rejected by the people. The Trinamool Congress-led by Mamata Banerjee won the State by huge margins.

After the humiliating defeat in the Assam election, some Congress leaders spoke for promoting Rahul Gandhi to the post of party president.

But the previous experience is not pleasant. Gandhi was not named as Congress's prime ministerial candidate in the 2014 parliamentary election. He, however, led the campaign. The party scored poorest-ever result with winning only 44 seats in Lok Sabha.

Except an alliance win in Bihar last year, the Congress has been an electoral hot mess since the national polls.

The Congress has only good news in Punducherry, union territory of India. Congress-DMK alliance won 17 of 30 seats in the Punducherry Assembly.

This win according to The Hindu, is providing a silver lining in an otherwise gloomy scenario for the Congress.

The Hindu further said: "Each successive election seems to reinforce that India's oldest party is no longer a contender even as the lead opposition player; instead, it will be up to an arrangement of regional leaders like Mamata Banerjee, J Jayalalithaa and Nitish Kumar to counter the BJP for the next national election in 2019."