

## HASINA, ABE AT ASEM Japan sought safety of its citizens in Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Japan has asked for a thorough investigation, sharing of related information and strict punishments for the perpetrators of the July 1 terror attack in which seven Japanese were killed and called for ensuring complete safety of Japanese people in Bangladesh.

Japan also hopes for full-fledged cooperation to ensure the safety of Japanese people living in and travelling to Bangladesh and to prevent recurrence.

Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe stated this in a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on July 15 during the 11th summit of Asia-Europe Meeting (Asem) in Mongolia, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan yesterday.

Expressing deep regret for the loss of many lives in the terrorist attack in Dhaka, Abe said the Japanese victims were all involved in development assistance, and the loss of their lives is extremely regrettable.

"It is necessary to secure the safety of assistance-related personnel and other Japanese people in order to minimize the impact on initiatives by Japanese people and investment policies," he said.

In this context, the Japanese PM  
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The wreckage of a freight train and a truck lie at Fatehpur rail crossing in Feni after their collision early yesterday. The accident left rail communications of Chittagong with other parts of the country snapped for about 10 hours on the route.

PHOTO:  
COLLECTED

## Tarique convicted, jailed for 7 years

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has been convicted and handed down punishment by a court in one of the 19 cases filed against him since 2007.

The money laundering case has become a high-profile one for several reasons.

For the first time in Bangladesh's history, a special agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation of the USA gave testimony and produced evidence against Tarique in a Dhaka court during trial of the case in 2011. The FBI gathered proof of money laundering by Tarique and his friend and business partner Giasuddin Al Mamun.

In 2013, the lower court acquitted the BNP leader of the money laundering charge. It jailed Mamun for seven years and fined him Tk 40 crore.

After delivering the verdict, the trial court judge left the country, giving rise to speculations that he had acquitted Tarique following an alleged deal.

The Anti-Corruption Commission, which filed the case in 2009, challenged Tarique's acquittal. Mamun also filed an appeal with the HC against the trial court verdict.

Yesterday, an HC bench found Tarique guilty of money laundering and sentenced him in absentia.

Tarique, who emerged as the country's most powerful man during the 2001-2006 tenure of the BNP government, was mired in controversy for his undue interference in the government administration.

He ran the controversial Hawa Bhaban, an alternative centre of power in the then government, which was shut down after the BNP government's tenure.

Tarique was arrested in an anti-corruption crackdown in March 2007 and was released on bail on

September 3 the following year. He flew to the UK on September 11 for treatment and has been staying in London since then.

In the money laundering case filed in 2009, he was accused of siphoning off the money to Singapore when the BNP was in power.

In its verdict, the HC observed, "This kind of corruption being backed by political influence threatens good governance, sustainable development and democratic process."

Tarique was found guilty of the offence of laundering the huge amount of ill-gotten funds. And he was culpably a conscious party to "that financial crime, thus deserves no leniency," it said.

The HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Amir Hossain upheld the trial court verdict that convicted and sentenced Mamun to seven years' imprisonment for the same offence.

It, however, reduced Mamun's fine from Tk 40 crore to Tk 20 crore, the same as Tarique's.

The laundered Tk 20 crore that the Singapore government returned in 2007 would be kept at Bangladesh Bank until the two convicts pay the fines, the HC said.

It ordered the ACC to take steps in accordance with the law to prosecute Hossain Group Chairman Moyazzam Hosen, Nirman Construction Chairman Khadiza Islam, Mayer Sairee and Merina Jaman -- all of whom were parties in the process of laundering money and aided the convicts in gaining the laundered money.

### CONSEQUENCES

The consequences of this conviction would be immense.

If Tarique, now in London, wants

to challenge the judgment, he must surrender before the trial court since he is now a fugitive.

"Since convict Md Tarique Rahman has been absconding, the sentence of imprisonment as awarded above shall be executed after causing his arrest or when he surrenders before the trial court, whichever is earlier," said the HC in its short order.

Tarique now has the option to surrender and file an appeal with the Supreme Court.

If he loses the legal battle at the apex court, he will have to suffer imprisonment for seven years. And this will disqualify him from contesting the parliamentary elections for at least 12 years.

According to Article 66 (2) (d) of the constitution, a person shall be disqualified for election or for being a member of parliament if he has been on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years, and unless a period of five years has elapsed since his release.

Tarique is facing more than a dozen criminal cases, including the one over the August 21 grenade attack case. Twenty-four people were killed and many wounded in the grisly attack on an Awami League rally in the capital in 2004.

Yesterday's verdict dealt a blow to the BNP that strongly denounced it.

The party termed the judgment "politically motivated" and alleged it is aimed at keeping Tarique away from politics.

To gradually pass the party leadership to her son Tarique, Khaleda made him its senior joint secretary general in 2003. But as a condition for his release in 2008, Tarique had to quit the post.

He, however, was made senior vice

chairman at the party council in December 2009. Provisions were introduced in the BNP charter, allowing the senior vice chairman to automatically assume the charge of the party in the absence of the chairperson.

Tarique retained the post at the last party council held a few months ago.

The BNP has been projecting him as the future leader who would lead it to power.

### WHAT CAN TARIQUE DO NOW?

Tarique's lawyer Zainul Abedin told reporters that his client didn't get justice as he was not involved in any offence of money laundering in any manner.

He said they would take the next legal step in consultation with Tarique after receiving the full text of the HC judgment.

Talking to reporters, ACC lawyer Khurshid Alam Khan said Tarique has to surrender before the trial court for filing an appeal with the SC.

He will get 30 days to file appeal after the HC releases the full verdict, he said.

It has been proved through the HC verdict that nobody is above the law, he added.

### HC OBSERVATIONS

"It is to be noted with regret that Md Tarique Rahman belonging to a political class which was saddled with responsibility of directing the affairs of the country had acted as a conscious part of the financial crime," said the HC.

"He being the mighty political elite by virtue of his position obtained dirty money in the name of 'consultation fee' through his close cohort [convict Giasuddin Al Mamun]."

"This manner of financial crimes, the upshot of achieving wealth in

corrupt ways committed under political shield, is on increase. Time has come to get this type of criminal activities carried out by using political favour and patronisation halted for the cause of well-being of the country and its development process."

The HC judges said, "We emphatically observe that corrupt practices and political influences indisputably make significant space for an individual or group to be indulged in such financial crime like 'money laundering' which leaves perverse influence on the entire society."

"The trend of obtaining ill-gotten money by extending undue favour to an individual or a group, in exercise of political might must be stopped. The society should awake to condemn and prevent political patronisation in accomplishing such organised financial criminal activities affecting country's economy and development."

"The victim of the financial crime like money laundering is every citizen of this country... Might of the offender engaged in laundering huge amount of ill-gotten money, hiding its source and means, must be resisted by awarding appropriate punishment for the sake of country's ongoing economic development," they added.

WHERE IS JUDGE MOTAHAH?  
Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said Tarique got acquitted in the case at the trial court by influencing its judge.

The judge (Motahar Hossain of Dhaka Special Judge's Court-3) along with his family members left for Malaysia a few days after he delivered the judgment, acquitting Tarique in November 2013, said Anisul.

The minister also said the government issued a notice asking him to get back to work, but he didn't respond.

## Robbers loot gold shop in Faridpur

A CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Armed robbers looted 150 Bhoori of gold ornaments from a jewellery shop Wednesday night in Faridpur town.

A CCTV camera installed inside the shop caught the gun-wielding robbers in full action looting Meghna Jewellers at Bangla Engineering Market of Mojib Shorok Niltoly in the town around

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TO WATCH VIDEO



8:30pm.

The robbers ravaged the shop and grabbed as much jewellery as they could collect their loot in a sack. During the looting, a robber is seen hurling cocktails outside the entrance of the shop to scare people away.

Towards the end of the robbery, one of the robbers sensing that his cohorts had already left, made a somewhat comic exit.

Basudav Karmoker, owner of the shop, filed a case against 7 unknown robbers with Kotoali Police Station.

"We are trying to arrest the robbers," Md Najid Uddin, office-in-charge of the police station, said.

## Govt's political

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special court to get the acquittal order. The judge left the country with his family members and went to Malaysia a few days after he delivered the verdict in the corruption case on November 17, 2013.

The government issued a notice asking him to join work but he didn't.

Regarding the filing of an appeal against the HC verdict, the minister said the BNP leader would have to surrender to appeal against the conviction.

"He must surrender before the lower court before filing an appeal," Anisul Huq said.

Tarique will be arrested and brought back to the country with the help of Interpol to execute the HC verdict, he added.

"There is no extradition treaty between the United Kingdom and Bangladesh. So, the Bangladesh government will try to bring him [Tarique] back through Interpol."

Talking to The Daily Star, several BNP leaders yesterday said they had predicted that such verdict would be passed on Tarique who was considered the next BNP chairperson after Khaleda.

However, some party leaders said the verdict might blemish the image of the party at home and abroad.

BNP leaders said they will face the case politically and legally.

"We think that it [HC verdict] is part of the government's conspiracy to derail BNP's ongoing movement to form national unity against militancy. But we will not step into that trap. The BNP chief will go ahead with the move," said a senior leader very close to Khaleda.

Protesting and condemning the role of the government and the Anti-Corruption Commission, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said in London that on instructions from the government, the ACC had appealed in the High Court against the acquittal order of Tarique.

"We think it [Tarique's punishment] is part of the government's blue print to destroy Zia family and the nationalist forces," said Rizvi Ahmed, senior joint secretary general of the party, at a press briefing at the BNP's Nayapaltan headquarters.

The BNP chief yesterday night sat with party leaders at her political office in Gulshan to discuss the verdict and other recent issues.

### POLICE DETAINED 13 BNP MEN

Meanwhile, the police detained 13 leaders and activists of the BNP near the party's Nayapaltan central office in the capital yesterday morning.

Morshed Alam, officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Station, said the detainees included party's assistant office secretary Taiful Islam.

They were detained before the HC delivered the verdict on an appeal against the acquittal order.

Meanwhile, Jatityatabadi Chhatra Dal yesterday in a press statement announced that it would enforce a strike at all educational institutions across the country on Sunday in protest at the High Court verdict against Tarique Rahman.

### BNP'S DEMONSTRATION

The BNP will hold a countrywide demonstration to protest the "government's conspiracy" to keep Tarique away from politics. However, the party is yet to fix the date.

The decision was made at a meeting between BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia and the party's senior leaders at her Gulshan office in the capital last night.

The party is likely to announce its programmes at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan central office around 11:00am today, said meetings sources.

## 'Dhaka not alone in fight against terror'

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Bhaban in Dhaka. West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee joined in from Kolkata.

In his speech, Modi said, "It's a matter of pain for me as well as for the people of my country that there were two terror incidents in Dhaka and Kishoreganj during the holy month of Ramadan. It's a sad moment when temples and their priests as also civilians were subjected to inhumane torture."

Hasina in her speech described the inauguration of the Integrated Check Post as another special and memorable day for Bangladesh and India, and said it would open up a new horizon in bilateral cooperation in the region, reports BBS.

"The day is also very significant in terms of mutual exchange between Bangladesh and India," she noted.

Termining inter-country trade as the main driving force for domestic economy, Hasina said the two governments have already taken various measures to further boost the trade ties.

"...the Petrapole check post is a 'milestone' in the efforts for welfare of the people of India and Bangladesh," the Indian PM said adding, "India and Bangladesh are walking shoulder to shoulder along

the path of development."

Stressing that economic development and connectivity are closely linked to each other, Modi said the Petrapole-Benapole integrated check post will serve to foster more economic integration and connectivity between India and Bangladesh.

He said India's development is linked with the development of all its neighbours. He also thanked Mamata Banerjee for officially joining the inauguration of the check post and said he appreciated her role in improving India-Bangladesh relations.

Modi began his speech by wishing Eid-ul-Fitr greetings to "brothers and sisters of Bangladesh on my behalf and on behalf of the people of India".

Hasina hoped the mutual trade and commerce would further expand following the inauguration of the ICP at Benapole-Petrapole point.

She mentioned that it was necessary to modernise Benapole-Petrapole land ports as the major portion of the goods of bilateral trades is transported through these ports.

The PM also hoped that recent development of the infrastructure there would ensure completion of trade-friendly service-oriented

Hasina and Modi jointly opened the biggest land port in South Asia -- Petrapole Integrated Check Post (ICP)

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee also participated from Kolkata in the videoconference.

Around 70-80% of the India-Bangladesh trade passes through Petrapole-Benapole, a key land border crossing.

Trade worth around \$5 billion takes place through Petrapole-Benapole land port

Petrapole-Benapole will serve to foster more economic integration and connectivity between India and Bangladesh.

ICP to provide better facilities for effective and efficient discharge of functions such as security, immigration, customs, movement of persons, goods and transport

Approximately 1.2 million people and 1,50,000 trucks cross Petrapole-Benapole every year.

activities between the two countries.

About the impact of the newly built integrated check post, Hasina said it would not only expand trade and commerce but also play a role in strengthening inter-connectivity between the two countries.

"Besides, it will help complete all immigration formalities of the visitors travelling to and from India more quickly than before," she said.

Hasina thanked Modi and Mamata for setting up the ICP at Petrapole according to the earlier commitment of their government.

Mamata said, "It is a historic day. The biggest land port has begun its journey. A new horizon has opened. Business worth Rs 68,000 crore is involved in this land port set up on 100 acres of land."

Pointing out that West Bengal is the gateway to Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan, she said, "We want to develop our relationship."

Assuring all-out help, the West Bengal chief minister said her government has decided to set up a police station at Petrapole.

Diplomatic circle in Dhaka has termed the initiative another move towards stronger ties and said it shows the relations between the two neighbours have reached a new

height.

According to the High Commission of India, around 70-80% of the India-Bangladesh trade passes through Petrapole. Trade worth around \$5 billion takes place at Petrapole, which is more than all the other Indian land ports and land customs stations put together.

Approximately 1.2 million people and 150,000 trucks cross Petrapole-Benapole every year.

Officials said the Petrapole ICP is envisaged to overcome the infrastructural bottlenecks to provide facilities for effective and efficient discharge of functions such as security, immigration, customs, quarantine, etc. while also providing support facilities for smooth cross-border movement of persons, goods and transport.

This is the second international-standard multi-purpose Integrated Check Post (ICP) between the two countries. The first along the Akhaura-Agartala point on India-Bangladesh border was opened in November 2013.

Earlier on March 23 this year, both Hasina and Modi had their last video conference when they inaugurated the supply of 10GBps broadband internet from Bangladesh to India and 100MW power from India to Bangladesh.