



Authorities salvage ML Oishi from the Sandhya river in Barisal yesterday. Right, a grandfather carrying the body of a child, recovered from the sunken vessel.



PHOTO: ARIFUL RAHMAN

PM awarded for women empowerment

BSS, New York

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has been conferred with the "Agent of Change" award and "Planet 50-50 Champion" honour for her outstanding contributions to women empowerment.

The UN Women recognised the PM as Planet 50-50 Champion, while the Global Partnership Forum honoured her with the award at a reception at the UN headquarters on Wednesday.

President of the Republic of Malta Marie Louise Coleiro Preca and First Lady of the United Nations Ban Soon-taek were also given the honours along with the Bangladesh premier.

Lakshmi Puri, deputy executive director of UN Women, delivered the welcome address and read out citations for the awards.

Receiving the award, Hasina said: "I feel humbled by these recognitions... I thank UN Women and Global Partnership Forum for giving me this honour."

She said the honour was a big recognition for Bangladeshi women as the true agents of change. "This is a recognition for our women working in equal partnership with our men... I dedicate the awards to the people of Bangladesh for having faith in my vision for change."

Hasina remembered her father, Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, for raising her with that vision.

"I believe sustainable future of our planet is a shared responsibility of our women and men. We have arrived at a time in our history when gender equality is no longer an aspiration, but a real possibility everywhere."

The path to women's empowerment has not been easy, and would not always be smooth, she added. "But we must forge ahead with courage and determination."

The PM said she dreams of a world where women's rights would be respected by all and violence and discriminations against them would be things of the past.

She expressed her gratefulness to Bangladeshis for giving solid proof of the country's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

"On their behalf, I reaffirm our

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Work together to root out terrorism

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"We see these menaces sweeping across borders. No country seems immune... no individual is beyond their target. The terrorists are killing many innocent people everywhere, from the USA to Europe, Africa to Asia," she added.

She stressed the need for finding out the mentors, masterminds, abettors, financiers, arms suppliers and trainers of the terrorists and extremists, and taking stern action against them.

"As a victim of terrorist attacks, I myself have a 'zero tolerance' approach to terrorism and violent extremism. Our government did succeed in disintegrating the home-grown terrorist groups, plugging their regular financing pipelines, and flushing out the regional operatives from our territory."

With the rise of certain international terrorist entities, it appears some of the local fringe elements have drawn inspiration and managed to regroup and rebrand themselves, the PM said.

"Bangladesh, a unique country of religious harmony, experienced a grisly attack on July 1 when home-grown terrorists killed 20 people at a Dhaka restaurant. We had been able to rescue 13 hostages unhurt. The horrific incident imprinted a deep scar on the hearts of Bangladeshi people."

Hasina urged world leaders to find common grounds in the interest of mankind to end the ongoing global disorder to take forward the world towards peace and prosperity.

Terming the UN a unique platform to do so, she said: "Let us renew our resolve to create an organisation of enduring relevance."

Reiterating Bangladesh's firm commitment to global peace, she said the country would carry on promoting a culture of peace.

In her 19-minute speech, the premier highlighted Bangladesh's socio-economic development, current political situation and the government's stride to combat terrorism and militancy.

About the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), she said political will behind the agenda needs to be translated into concrete and meaningful support for countries that are lagging behind.

She called for fulfilling the internationally agreed development commitments for the Least Developed Countries to pave the way for their progress. The Technology Bank for LDCs should be geared at promoting

innovation and predictable resource flow, she observed.

In Bangladesh, she said, the government has already included most SDGs into the national development plans. A platform under her supervision has been created to coordinate and monitor the work. Consultations are going on with local governments, civil society, media and academia.

She said Bangladesh has experienced one of the fastest poverty reduction rates in the world with a modest resource base. "We've brought down poverty from 56.7 percent in 1991 to 22.4 percent today. We've already graduated from the UNDP's low human development category to medium, and the World Bank's lower-middle income status."



PM Hasina addressing the 71st Session of the UN General Assembly at the UN headquarters on Wednesday.

PHOTO: BSS

Despite global recession, the export earnings grew by more than three times to \$34.24 billion; remittance flow increased nearly three times; and foreign currency reserve jumped by 8.5 times from \$3.5 billion to over \$31 billion over the last seven years, she mentioned.

During the same period, the country's power generation capacity increased nearly threefold and foreign direct investment also rose by three times.

"A key to our development strategy is our focus on addressing inequality through social security, decent work and financial inclusion. We allocate over 13 percent of our budget to social safety net spending, which is 2.3 percent of our GDP," the premier told the

UNGA.

But the climate change threatens many of the country's development gains, said Hasina.

The landmark Paris Climate Agreement recognises the importance of adaptation, loss and damage, and climate justice, said the PM, adding that her cabinet ratified the agreement. She hoped the large carbon emitting countries would ratify the deal soon.

About her government's aim to build an inclusive, empowered, digital and knowledge-based society, Hasina said the Bangladesh government was focusing on innovative public service delivery, mass access to information and enhanced transparency and accountability.

She said the government has set up

aspirations.

Multimodal transport networks are being built to promote trade and people-to-people contacts among Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal. The work of the 6.15km Padma Bridge has been commissioned with the country's own resources, she added.

She told the UN that discussions were underway to build a deep sea port, while the third seaport in Payra commenced operations. The work on the metro rail project in Dhaka city was also going on. A total of 100 economic zones were being set up across the country to allow potential investors to invest in Bangladesh.

Such forward-looking thrust in Bangladesh's progress was supported by the country's impressive macro- and socioeconomic records. In 2015-2016 fiscal year, the country's economy posted a GDP growth rate of over 7 percent, she pointed out.

Stressing the importance of women empowerment, the premier said sustainable development would not be tenable without women's participation.

In Bangladesh, she said, a host of measures, including promotion of girls' education, undertaken half a decade ago, started yielding dividends. Women are increasingly becoming an integral part of the country's development endeavours.

About ensuring accountability and justice for mass atrocities, she said the country shall remain vocal about recognising the role of national judicial processes in this regard.

"We have moved past decades of impunity to ensure the trial of local perpetrators of genocide and crimes against humanity during our Liberation War in 1971."

Hasina said the recent efforts to resume the Middle East Peace Process and end the hostilities against the Palestinian people must be pursued in the right direction.

She congratulated Peter Thomson as the president of the 71st session of the UNGA and commended his predecessor Mogens Lykkeskov for his dynamic role.

The PM also remembered the contributions of outgoing UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, terming him a true and trusted friend of Bangladesh.

Presidents of Croatia and Sri Lanka Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic and Maithripala Sirisena; prime ministers of Romania, Georgia and Australia Dacian Cioloș, Giorgi Kvirikashvili, and Malcolm Turnbull, among others, took part in the discussion in the evening session.

Death toll 24

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navy, the coast guard, fire service and BIWTA officials.

According to the local administration, one more person is missing. However, locals claimed that four to five more people, who were on the boat, were traceless.

Yesterday, locals and relatives of the missing anxiously waited on the bank to receive the bodies.

At one point, they raised a hue and cry and brought out a procession demanding that the bodies of their loved ones be recovered and given to them.

Zakir Hossain, additional district magistrate of Barisal and also chief of the nine-member probe committee formed to investigate the incident, claimed that they had not received any complaint from any family that their loved ones were still missing.

Citing divers, he said there were no more bodies around the spot.

Still, some people gathered on the bank of the river claiming that they did not get the bodies of their relatives.

Siddiqur Rahman, an office assistant at a Sylhet court, lost his wife and twins Rabbi and Shanta. Only Rabbi's body was recovered yesterday.

"... We are yet to find the bodies of my sister-in-law and niece," said Abdul Razzak, Siddiqur's brother.

Siddiqur got on the launch with his wife and children. He managed to swim ashore, but could not save them, he added.

They were looking for the bodies in the Sandhya by a boat.

Tripti, whose sister Alpina is still missing, said they were yet to get her body.

Additional District Magistrate Zakir Hossain said Oishi Plus had no route permit.

Barisal Port Officer Mustafizur Rahman said it was in fact a trawler, which was modified as a launch. It used to ply different waterways in the area illegally.

Locals said one Yusuf Hossain rented the launch from Yusuf Miah on Wednesday after Ikra, a small vessel that plied Banaripara-Uzirpur-Swarupkathi route regularly, went out of order.

The launch carrying around 50 passengers was on its way to Uzirpur from Banaripara. It was trying to anchor at Masjidbari point, which is not a designated stop, to pick up and drop off passengers.

It was raining and the current was very strong in the river. As the launch was about to anchor, a large chunk of the bank collapsed on its front part and it turned upside down instantly, said Abdul Mannan, chairman of Syedkathi union under Banaripara upazila.

New law

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Speaking at the programme, Mayor Annisul Huq said Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC) in March next year will declare two streets in the capital off limits to cars "to ease congestion and pollution".

"We've planned for two roads. One in Mirpur-Mohammadpur area and another in Gulshan-Banani area ... no matter how small the roads are, they will be declared car free next March."

The car-free street in Mirpur-Mohammadpur area was yet to be fixed but the DNCC is considering declaring a street near Banani market off limits to cars, he added.

Holding overpopulation responsible for congestion and pollution in the capital, the DNCC mayor said, "Eleven lakh vehicles use the streets in the capital, which has the capacity for three lakh. How will you solve traffic jam problem? How do I save my city from pollution?"

Many countries have declared streets car-free to ease pollution and congestion, he said, adding that keeping some city streets car-free is possible in Bangladesh too.

Yesterday, a portion of the Manik Mia Avenue was closed and temporarily made car-free.

Secret life of the Slow Loris

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When we walked into the forest, silhouettes of large trees stood against the blue sky and stars twinkled through the gaps of the evergreen forest. Soon after, the night dwellers confirmed their presence with piercing calls, yet managed to remain concealed.

At night, a known trail in the jungle that witnessed my footprints a hundred times suddenly appeared strange and the trees remained the same but held a different form of life.

Our objective was not ambiguous as our specific target was to sight the Slow Loris, which has never been studied in Bangladesh. It is one of the least

known primates in the world. This globally vulnerable species has a trait rare among a mammal or a primate—a serious toxic bite that is often used against predators. Mother Slow Loris is known to protect its infants by licking the toxin onto their fur.

With direct support from Sabir Bin Muzaffar (associate professor of the United Arab Emirates University), Hassan Al-Razi Chayan took up the challenge to learn more about this nocturnal species. He and his team members—Sabit and Shaikot—developed a unique expertise of finding Slow Loris foraging amidst dense foliage at night and recording their behavior.

It is remarkable to think that such a rare species still occurs in our north-eastern hill forests in incredible density. To spend night after night documenting their secret life has been a thrilling experience.

As we walked along the familiar yet mysterious trail, gusts of wind swooshed the canopy overhead and our flashlights chased each movement. An owl flew over the path and inaudibly disappeared into the darkness. After that, we waited in complete stillness for some time.

We continued to walk from one bend to another. At one point, Sabit whispered: "a flying squirrel!" A particolored flying squirrel glided

downward to the other side of the trail.

Just when we were about to call it a night, Sabit asked us to check out a spot higher up in the branches and directed our eyes with his flashlight. We saw a furry animal moving gently amongst the green leaves and fungi infested stout branches. It was the stunning Slow Loris.

It continued to eat and did not bother to look at us, but when we started taking photographs, the sound of the shutters (we did not use camera flash, only relied on torchlights) grabbed its attention and the loris looked at us with its beautiful round eyes that glimmered like stars. It moved slowly but gracefully, hugging

thick branches and constantly looking left or right and up or down to find its preferred feed.

I have seen Slow Loris in the wild during the day at the Kaptai National Park but only for a minute or less. However, watching this phenomenal mammal in an upright position higher up in the canopy reaching out to grab a flying moth took my breath away! We did not speak to each other for hours as if we wanted nothing else in the world. We just wanted to be a part of the moment, in the elements of a Slow Loris.

The writer is a Conservation Biologist, currently working on threatened species conservation and research in Bangladesh and abroad.

Boy asks Obama if he can adopt refugee

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ambulance, covered in dust and blood, shocked the world and inspired six-year-old Alex, from Scarsdale, New York, to take action.

In a handwritten letter sent to the White House, Alex asked Obama to go and collect Omran and bring him to his house where "we will be waiting for you guys with flags, flowers, and balloons."

Alex said that Omran could be part of his family, and offered to be his brother. He said he would teach him how to speak English, to ride a bike and added that his sister Catherine would share her toys with him.

Obama read Alex's words aloud in a speech he gave at the United Nations earlier this week, before posting a video of Alex reading the letter himself

to Facebook.

In his message, Obama asked people to read the letter to "understand why he had decided to share it with the world."

"Those are the words of a six-year-old boy—a young child who has not learned to be cynical, or suspicious, or fearful of other people because of where they come from, how they look, or how they pray," the President wrote.

"We should all be more like Alex. Imagine what the world would look like if we were," he added.

At the time of writing the post has collected more than 100,000 "likes" and been shared more than 60,000 times, with many Facebook users praising the compassion shown by Alex.

One Facebook user wrote: "A six-year-old who has more humanity, love,

and understanding than most adults. Kudos to his parents and I know the world will see more great things coming from Alex."

Another added: "I heard this earlier today, as read by my president. Even with that pre-conditioning, made me cry while reading it just now. Neither of these sweet little boys, someone's sons, are Skittles."