

Play stronger role in our development

PM to World Bank

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said she expects the World Bank to play a stronger role in Bangladesh's development endeavours.

"The World Bank is our one of the leading development partners. I hope, it'll play a more proactive role in our endeavours," she told a function.

The government and the World Bank jointly arranged the programme at Osmani Memorial Auditorium, marking the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

"All our development plans are aimed at realising our Father of the Nation's dream of building a hunger, poverty, illiteracy and exploitation-free Sonar Bangladesh."

Hasina said the people of Bangladesh are very brave, committed and hard-working. The resilient people of this country are determined to change their future and build a better Bangladesh for the next generation, she added.

The PM mentioned that the country has already been placed at the medium category of human development index and upgraded to a lower middle-income country according to its per capita income level.

"We're pursuing an inclusive growth strategy to graduate from the LDC status shortly and become a developed nation by 2041 with a land of peace, prosperity and harmony," she told her audience.

About the spread of terrorism across the world, she said, "Our government has adopted a 'zero tolerance' policy towards any kind of violent activities. We've been able to contain militancy in the country. We'll further strengthen our drive to eliminate the scourge of militancy from the society."

She urged all to come forward to make the world a beautiful place which will be free from poverty and hunger. "Let's work closely to make this world free from poverty and hunger."

Hasina said Bangladesh has experienced a robust progress in poverty reduction from more than 70 percent in 1971 to 56.7 percent in 1991 and 22.4 percent at present.

World Bank president Dr Jim Yong Kim, World Bank Vice President for South Asia region Annette Dixon, and Finance Minister AMA Muhith also spoke on the occasion.



PEACEFUL PROTEST...Indigenous Buddhist men and women stand wearing black badges near Raja Para Bil Buddhist temple in Bandarban's Lama upazila, protesting an attack on the temple by land grabbers on October 2. For the first time, they are not celebrating Prabarona Purnima, one of the most colourful festivals of the Buddhists, over the issue. The photo was taken on Sunday.

PHOTO: SANJOY KUMAR BARUA

Maqbul new ameer of Jamaat

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Maqbul Ahmad took oath as the elected ameer of Jamaat-e-Islami yesterday.

The 70-year-old leader, who had been the party's acting ameer for the last six years, has been elected for the top post of the party that vehemently opposed and dejected Bangladesh's Liberation War in 1971 and its subsequent independence from Pakistan.

Jamaat was banned in independent Bangladesh until 1979 when the party was reborn following the lifting of the ban against a backdrop of a political changeover.

On August 17, the party's rukans (oath taking members), by a secret ballot that held at 83 organisational districts of the party, appointed Maqbul as the ameer for the tenure beginning in 2017 and ending in 2019.

After taking oath, Maqbul in an extended statement expressed his gratitude and respect to the people and the freedom fighters for their gallantry and supreme sacrifices during the Liberation War in 1971.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 6

Price of poor governance

FROM PAGE 1

waterways, or a building collapse or factory fire, or any other unexpected incident.

Take the latest tragic incident at Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Four people, including a pregnant woman, were killed and three others injured when an ambulance ran over them on Saturday. This is not a mere accident.

The boy, an assistant to the driver, was allowed by the driver and the owner to drive the ambulance due to the culture of non-enforcement of laws. Plagued by corruption and irregularities, the BRTA, responsible for enforcing laws to operate motor vehicles, is unable to do so.

As usual, the tragic incident exposed another dangerous story--the ambulance business is unregulated. There is no law or any regulatory body that either issues license or regulates the very necessary ambulance service. Again, the culprits are within the BRTA-Bangladesh Road Transport Authority, a department under the communication ministry, who opened the door for this business.

The Daily Star's report published yesterday shows how greedy people with the help of BRTA men are running

ambulance businesses to make money from helpless people. Beat-up minibuses are registered with the BRTA with bribes. The officials of the regulatory body permit these vehicles to be turned into ambulances even though they lack the required life-saving equipment or accessories for comfort of the patients. Thanks to lack of governance in this sector, they have been running this illegal business. Just as a driver needs a license to drive, a microbus needs a license to be used as an ambulance. Negligence in this case has led to the "murder" of four. Who is responsible for that?

There are many other instances of tragic incidents in recent times caused by poor governance.

On September 10, just ahead of the Eid-ul Azha this year, at least 34 workers were killed in a blaze in the Tampaco Foils Ltd in Tongi. The boiler explosion which resulted in fire and structural collapse of the building wreaked havoc on workers' lives. There was alleged negligence on the part of the office of the chief inspector of boilers, a department under the industries ministry. The exploded boiler was not maintained properly. The department did not inspect it. Moreover there

were excessive amounts of chemicals stored unlawfully in the factory.

The department of inspection for factories and establishments, a wing of the labour ministry, also did not inspect the factory to ensure workplace safety and compliance in Tampaco. This is another example of poor governance leading to "killing" of people.

The Rana Plaza tragedy in Savar, the biggest ever industrial disaster in recent history, also demonstrates the very poor state of governance.

A ruling party man had built the nine-storey building ignoring building codes. Reportedly, he even grabbed the land on which he had built Rana Plaza. In 2013, it collapsed, having killed more than 1100 garment workers.

Being a ruling party man, it was not difficult for the owner to continue possession of the grabbed land and he did not need to follow laws to build Rana Plaza. Even the law enforcers, the Industrial Police, after being informed about the cracks in the building, could not enforce the law as the building owner was a ruling party man who was blessed by the ruling party's local MP.

There are more tragedies caused by poor governance. The nine-storey

Spectrum Garments at Savar collapsed in April 2005, killing 64. The son-in-law of a then ruling BNP MP was its owner. Again, the five-storey Phoenix Group at Tejagon collapsed in February 2006, killing 21 and a five-storey residential building at Begunbari collapsed in June 2010 killing 25. All the buildings were built violating the building codes. Rajuk, responsible for enforcing the building code, failed due to its unscrupulous officials who allowed the constructions.

A fire at Tazreen Fashion in November 2012 killed more than 115 garments workers. There were more fires in garments factories causing more deaths.

Take another example of poor governance. People might have forgotten the Nimitoli devastating fire incident of June 2010, which instantly killed 117 people. A chemical warehouse on the ground floor of a five-storey residential building was the source of the fire. Hundreds of warehouses were set up in the residential area in the old part of Dhaka by bribing the government department that issues licenses for the warehouse for chemicals.

The violation of laws by crooked officials of BIWTA and owners of unfit water vessels have become another

area of frequent manmade disasters. One of the worst launch capsizes took place in March 2012 on the Meghna river, killing no fewer than 145 passengers underlining poor governance.

For poor governance, the road network is not free of the curse of corruption and violation of laws. Untrained persons get driving licenses, and unfit vehicles get road permits. In addition, there is reckless driving. This causes frequent road accidents killing a huge number and maiming many every year.

All of the above incidents are glaring examples of the poor governance of many government departments. There is no dearth of laws. But failure to enforce them keeps rule of law a fantasy. Even they are not held accountable for their failures that cause disasters. People's lives and properties are not even worth the papers the laws are written on.

Collectively, their failure exposes overall governance failure. All efforts to establish good governance and rule of law will fail until the various departments play their due roles. They must be made accountable for their failure to do their mandated jobs. Otherwise, tragedies will continue, showing how poor governance "kills" people.



The carcass of the wild elephant which died of electrocution at Garo hills under Jhenaigati upazila in Sherpur yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Wild elephant found dead in Sherpur

STAR REPORT

A wild elephant died of electrocution at Garo hills under Jhenaigati upazila in Sherpur district yesterday.

A substantial electric shock appeared to be the primary cause of death of the 18-foot-long elephant, weighing nearly four tonnes, said upazila wildlife official Dipak Kumar Sarker, who performed autopsy of the carcass.

Asht Ranjan, conservator of forests at Wildlife and Nature Conservation Circle, said forest officials recovered the dead elephant from bordering village of Tawakocha under Kangsha union of Jhenaigati upazila yesterday morning.

The elephant apparently died of

electrocution, said the forest officials following completion of initial investigation.

A total of four wild elephants, including this one, died so far this year in bordering areas of Jhenaigati, said District Wildlife Preservation and Biodiversity official Mohammad Kamaruzzman.

Over the last one and a half months two herds, consisting about 70 to 80 wild elephants, have been ravaging about 4.5 kilometres of bordering areas in Kangsha union of Sherpur district.

In the past couple of weeks alone, these wild elephants killed at least seven people on the Garo hills in Jhenaigati upazila.

According to a correspondent from Sherpur, residents of Tawakocha and Tilapara villages ran away from their homes to safety as a herd of wild elephants came lopping down to Tawakocha and Tilapara villages early yesterday morning and damaged seven dwellings and surrounding paddy fields.

The villagers later on found the dead elephant and informed local forest department. A team of forest officials led by Tawakocha beat officer Ashraf Alam recovered the carcass of the dead elephant.

Jhenaigati Upazila Nirbahi Officer Selim Reza confirmed the death of the elephant and destruction of seven houses.

WB to give \$1b in 3yrs

FROM PAGE 1

Despite the success in reducing maternal and child mortality, and improving child nutritional status, the number of stunted children here is among the highest in the world, according to the WB.

Among children under five, some 5.5 million are stunted, out of whom poorer children bear a disproportionate burden of stunted growth.

The WB's investments in children's early years in Bangladesh will support programmes to ensure child nutrition and include a conditional cash transfer programme targeted at 600,000 poor families in 43 sub-districts, it said in a statement.

Kim on a two-day visit here observed End Poverty Day in Dhaka yesterday.

He said the WB wants to increase its investment in Bangladesh to improve nutrition and cognitive development of children in their early years.

Adequate nutrition prenatally and in the first two years after birth can prevent devastating permanent effects on cognitive and brain development and thus improve the long-run earning potential of children.

"Rapid brain and physical development, social relationships, and environments work together to create phenomenal advances in children's capabilities during this time frame.

"Investing in the socio-economic environments of particularly poor children during their early childhood years can help increase their earning ability and lift their households out of poverty," Kim said.

The WB's financial assistance announced by Kim this time represents almost a 100 percent increase in investment compared to the previous three-year period.

Praising Bangladesh's record in reducing poverty at the meeting with the finance minister, Kim said the world could learn much from how Bangladesh had improved the livelihoods of tens of millions and empowered women despite facing persistent challenges, including those related to governance and climate change.

At a programme jointly organised by the WB and the government yesterday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said her government's development works have a human face and strive to protect poor and vulnerable groups and improve their livelihoods, reports UNB.

Social safety net programmes coupled with inclusive growth approach played a catalytic effect in this regard.

Hasina thanked the WB for

showcasing Bangladesh's success as she said, the recognition will inspire the nation to further strengthen its development efforts.

At the briefing, Kim said, "Competing in today's digital economy requires a workforce with well-developed intelligence, which is why the World Bank wants to increase its investments to end stunting in Bangladesh as soon as possible."

The major reason behind Bangladesh's success in reducing poverty over the last 30 years is that it has focused on investing in people, he said.

Many countries in the world focused more on investing in roads, in IT, and in what some people call hard infrastructure. "Bangladesh has made special focus on ensuring that its people are more educated and have access to basic necessities," Kim added.

"The WB is a very important partner of Bangladesh. We get largest chunk of assistance from this institution. Hopefully we will continue to be the recipient for some more years, at least for the next three years for sure," Muhith said.

In the last 45 years Bangladesh received almost \$24 billion from the WB, which flowed into almost every sector including education, health, transport and communication, he added.

Addressing a function later on the day to mark International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, Kim said nearly 800 million people around the world lived on less than \$1.90 a day in 2013. That is a reduction of about 100 million people in just one year from 2012. Half of the world's extreme poor now live in Sub-Saharan Africa, and another third live in South Asia.

"There are still far too many people surviving on far too little but Bangladesh's impressive record in dramatically reducing extreme poverty gives us hope that this trend will continue and that other countries can do the same," he said.

"Bangladesh offers us many lessons in ending extreme poverty, and one of the most important is that innovation plays a critical role."

To reach its goal to become a middle-income country by 2021 and to end extreme poverty by 2030, Bangladesh must sustain its economic growth, create more and better jobs, focus on energy and transport infrastructure, make progress in improving the quality of health and education, and improve governance, including strengthening of anti-corruption measures.

The WB is looking forward to working with Bangladesh to promote private sector investment by strengthening governance and improving the investment climate, its president said.

Foreign direct investment is less than 1.7 percent of GDP in Bangladesh, far below that of most countries. Foreign direct investment in Vietnam, for instance, is 6.1 percent of GDP.

"Strengthening governance will help lead to more jobs in infrastructure, diversify exports, and ensure the health and safety of workers," Kim said.

Presenting a keynote paper, Paul Romer, senior vice-president and chief economist of the WB, said that when growth speeds up, income inequality can increase temporarily.

But this type of inequality arises because the benefits that all can ultimately share diffuse slowly, he said. At first, only a few people have access to the chance to learn from new ideas. As others gain access, they learn too. During this second, catch-up phase, the diffusion of ideas increases growth as it equalizes income.

"The experience in Bangladesh shows that it is possible to diffuse new ideas quickly enough to avoid even this temporary increase in inequality," he said.

TALKS OVER PADMA BRIDGE

Asked about the WB's withdrawal of financial commitment for the bridge and Bangladesh's commencement of building the construction with its own fund, the president of the global financial institution said "We understand the importance of the bridge and we continue to discuss it. But the government has begun work on it.

"Let me just say this: the development and growth of Bangladesh in all its aspects is extremely important to World Bank. We are aggressively looking for as much funding as we can possibly find to support Bangladesh. We did not have a chance to talk about it earlier."

Regarding the issue, Muhith told reporters that almost all the money earmarked for the bridge has already been committed to different other projects in Bangladesh.

"You know he [Kim] took over the presidency at a time when we had some problems with the World Bank. And I personally believe that [because of] his true intervention that we at last resolved the problem and went forward.

"And for the next cycle, we expect a higher commitment from the WB."