

Japan ratifies TPP despite Trump's opposition

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's parliament ratified the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free-trade deal yesterday, but it was largely viewed as an empty gesture owing to opposition by US President-elect Donald Trump.

A majority of upper house lawmakers, led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's ruling coalition, approved the bill, while the opposition voted against it, following last month's passage through the powerful lower house.

Japan's top government spokesman called the deal's passage "a message to the world about Japan's strong determination to promote free trade".

"We will continue to urge signatory countries to swiftly" pass the bill, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga told reporters in Tokyo.

US President Barack Obama championed the 12-nation deal saying it would enable the United States to set the global trade agenda in the face of China's increasing economic clout.

But Trump has strongly opposed the agreement, saying it would be bad for America and cost jobs, casting a huge shadow over its future.

Last month, Japan's leader said the TPP would be "meaningless" without the US.

The US and Japan are the biggest members of the massive deal, which encompasses some 40 percent of the global economy. It also includes Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

The deal, which has been years in the making, cannot be implemented in its current form without US ratification.

The TPP is seen as a counterweight to China, as Beijing expands its sphere of influence and promotes its own way of doing business -- seen as often running counter to largely Western-set global standards that emphasise transparency and respect for human rights and the environment.

Abe has made the TPP a pillar of his growth platform to revive exports and the world's number three economy.

But experts say that with Trump's election the deal is a non-starter.

Trump says he is in favour of free trade but that existing deals, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement between the US, Canada and Mexico, have not been fairly negotiated and do not serve US interests.

India working

FROM PAGE 16

Sheikh Hasina will receive an extremely warm welcome in India," said Vikas Swarup, spokesperson of the Indian external affairs ministry.

A highly placed source at the Prime Minister's Office said India might invite Hasina to its Republic Day parade as the chief guest.

"Our prime minister is on the panel of the probable chief guests for 2018. India will announce a name from the list and we are hopeful she would be the chief guest in 2018," said the source.

Talking to The Daily Star, an Indian diplomat yesterday said New Delhi already invited Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to be the chief guest at the Republic Day parade next year.

India-Bangladesh relations have already reached a new height and getting stronger by the day, said the diplomat, adding that India was eagerly waiting to offer a huge welcome to the Bangladesh premier.

Locals

FROM PAGE 16

Iqbal Hossain, additional police superintendent in Brahmanbaria, told The Daily Star on Thursday that Jahangir Alam, 30, one of the arrestees accused of instigating the attacks, in his confessional statement before a magistrate said Akhi had hired vehicles to transport people to the rallies on the day of the attack.

Abu Zafar, officer-in-charge of Nasirnagar Police Station, said the Detective Branch of police in Brahmanbaria was investigating Akhi's alleged involvement as an organiser of the attacks.

Akhi's name would be included in the cases if he is found to be involved, he added.

Six cases have been filed in connection with the mayhem, but Akhi has not been named in any of them though victims and eyewitnesses say he played a key role.

Sources in the law enforcement agencies said they were unable to arrest Akhi as he has blessings of an "influential figure" in the district.

Police said they arrested around 100 people over the attack. But locals say many of them are innocent.

On October 30, hundreds of religious zealots launched a synchronised attack on six Hindu villages in Nasirnagar and vandalised 100 houses and 17 temples. They also looted whatever valuables they could find. Before the attack, they spread communal hatred for two days using a Facebook post on the wall of a Hindu fisherman's account.

'We will rebuild'

Indonesian president pledges to help quake-hit people in Aceh

AFP, Pidie Jaya

Indonesian President Joko Widodo yesterday pledged to help the people of Aceh rebuild as he toured areas worst-hit by a devastating earthquake that killed more than 100 people and left thousands homeless.

The shallow 6.5-magnitude quake Wednesday levelled hundreds of homes, mosques and businesses across Aceh province, one of the areas worst affected by the destructive 2004 tsunami.

Rescue crews have been searching the rubble with sniffer dogs while excavators clear the debris-strewn streets two days after the disaster.

Humanitarian assistance is reaching the hardest-hit district of Pidie Jaya, where many spent a second night sleeping in shelters and overcrowded field hospitals.

Pope Francis offered his prayers to the victims overnight, urging them strength in their toughest hour.

Widodo, who flew to Aceh yesterday, met with victims in hospitals before visiting a local mosque dam-

aged in the quake.

The earthquake struck at dawn as many in the predominantly Muslim region were preparing for prayers.

"We will rebuild this mosque as soon as possible," he told the gathered crowd.

"We'll work through this together." Among those who gathered to hear Widodo speak was Rahmawati, who lost her husband and two children in the quake.

"I am happy the president is willing to see those of us who are grieving," she told AFP.

Aceh lies on the northern tip of Sumatra island, which is particularly prone to quakes.

A huge undersea earthquake in 2004 triggered a tsunami that engulfed several countries around the Indian Ocean, killing more than 170,000 people in Indonesia alone, the vast majority in Aceh.

Many parts of Indonesia experience frequent seismic and volcanic activity due to its position on the Pacific "Ring of Fire", where tectonic plates collide.

Missing madrasa student

FROM PAGE 2

Niamatullah told police that he was upset because his father neither paid his tuition fees regularly nor gave him pocket money, reports our Barisal correspondent.

This statement corroborated the version of his madrasa Principal Mufti Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, who talked to The Daily Star earlier.

Niamatullah's parents along with a team of Agailjhara police received him from the custody of Gendaria police and left for Barisal, said Mizanur.

Three days after he fled from Al-Jamiatul Nasisia Al Islamia Markas Madrasa, Niamatullah sent a text to his mother, seeking forgiveness and telling her not to worry about him.

The text, published in the media, sparked a speculation about him being involved in militancy.

Meanwhile, Ahsan Habib, 40, staff of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board, who has been reportedly missing since November 14, still

remains traceless.

Sub-inspector Nasiruddin of Motijheel Police Station said Habib's disappearance might be linked to "a family dispute".

His wife Monsura, however, told The Daily Star that she and Habib had been "happily married for 16 years".

Monsura filed a general diary with Motijheel Police Station on December 5, mentioning that her husband left the capital for his village home in Dinajpur on November 14 and had been missing since then.

Two Pabna Medical College students Tanvir Ahmed, 21, and Zakir Hossain, 22, who went missing on November 30 and December 1, still remain traceless.

Apart from the three, six youths went missing in the capital between November 29 and December 5. Their sudden disappearances have caused serious concern to their families, given that the Holey Artisan Bakery attackers and many other militant suspects disappeared in a similar fashion.

Exploited by employers

FROM PAGE 16

migrant workers."

She said Malaysian employers pay each Filipino worker at least 1,200 Malaysian Ringgit (MR) a month. But they pay MR 1,000 to a Bangladeshi worker, who gets only MR 800 or below after deductions for tax or levy.

The rights activist noted that Bangladesh government has failed to negotiate with the Malaysian government for ensuring better salaries for its workers.

"Malaysia is not going to hire workers from developed countries such as the USA, Australia or Canada. It hires workers only from least developed countries like Bangladesh and Nepal because it gets workers from these countries by offering very low wages."

"Bangladesh signed an agreement with Malaysia for G2G [government to government] recruitment system in 2012. Unfortunately, Bangladesh government didn't push Malaysian employers to pay higher salaries, it just asked them to pay the minimum."

For Bangladeshi workers, the G2G system can provide better protection, as it cuts migration costs and ensure other basic rights of the workers, she said.

If the two governments decide to engage private agencies in the recruitment process, only the licensed ones

should be allowed to do the job under strict regulations. It must be ensured that no one can cheat workers by making false promises, added Kishna.

Around four lakh Bangladeshis are legally working in the construction and plantation sectors in Malaysia, while some two lakh are working without proper documents.

Talking to this correspondent, Cloin Rajah, an international expert on migrant rights, said Bangladeshi migrant workers face a lot of repression abroad by unscrupulous employers and recruiters because the host countries are not protecting their rights.

"We need international standards. We cannot rely on the countries that are benefiting from the use of migrant workers in that way," said Rajah, a Malaysian-born expert who now lives in the USA.

The international community needs to create a standard that can be implemented and monitored, and that would give scope for imposing sanctions on the violators -- recruiters, employers or whoever they are, he noted.

"Sometimes, bilateral agreements are not that useful. In many cases, it is necessary to establish international standard ... That is why we have such a forum [GFMD] so that we can negotiate and discuss the best practices that are ready to use and what can be implemented," he said.

Rare discovery

FROM PAGE 16

specimen, the size of a dried apricot, at an amber market in northern Myanmar near the Chinese border.

The remarkable piece was destined to end up as a curiosity or piece of jewellery, with traders believing a plant fragment was trapped inside.

"I realised that the content was a vertebrate, probably theropod, rather than any plant," Xing told CNN.

"I was not sure that (the trader) really understood how important this specimen was, but he did not raise the price."

The findings, which shed fresh light on how dinosaurs looked, are published in the December issue of Current Biology.

Ryan McKellar, a paleontologist at the Royal Saskatchewan Museum in Canada and co-author of the paper, says he was blown away when Xing first showed him the piece of amber.

"It's a once in a lifetime find. The finest details are visible and in three dimensions."

Fragments of dinosaur-era bird wings have been found preserved in amber before but this is the first time part of a mummified dinosaur skeleton has been discovered, McKellarsaid.

The tail section belongs to a young coelurosaurian -- from the same group of dinosaurs as the predatory velociraptors and the tyrannosaurus.

The sparrow-sized creature could

No rivalry

FROM PAGE 16

Park in Narayanganj.

According to the electoral code of conduct, a lawmaker cannot campaign for any candidate in the elections to the local government bodies.

After AL picked Ivy as the mayor candidate in the December 22 polls, party president Sheikh Hasina held a meeting at the Gono Bhaban with Narayanganj district AL leaders, including Shamim and Ivy, on November 22. At the meeting, Hasina reportedly instructed all of them to work together to ensure Ivy's victory.

Sixteen days after that, Osman publicly extended his support to Ivy yesterday, refuting all media reports on the conflicts between them.

Terming Ivy as a "competent candidate" in the elections, the AL lawmaker said, "Even though we had other favourites, we had no difference of opinion about Ivy".

He said AL leaders and activists in Narayanganj would start an all-out campaign for Ivy, who would be contesting with party electoral symbol 'boat', tomorrow.

"Ensuring Ivy's victory in the elections would be a surprise [for her] from our side. And this victory has been confirmed. I am seeking everyone's blessings for her as I as an MP cannot ask for your votes," he said, describing Ivy as his "sister".

Criticising some BNP leaders' statements that Ivy would not win the elections, Shamim said, "They might have forgotten that Narayanganj is the birthplace of Awami League."

He also said the BNP has "no connection with people" and that they would not vote for the party as "it killed common people just to go to power".

The BNP has nominated advocate Shakhawat Hossain to vie for the mayor in the forthcoming Narayanganj City Corporation polls. Shamim also demanded trial in the cases filed over Monir, Tawki and sever murders in the district.

District Awami League General Secretary Abu Hasnat Shahid Badal, city AL president Anwar Hossain, among others, also spoke at the press conference yesterday.

EC not

FROM PAGE 3

they think.

Former election commissioner M Sakhawat Hussain said, "During any important election, the commission should directly communicate with the returning officer daily and monitor the situation on a regular basis as well as encourage the officer to take any bold step against irregularities."

"The commission should not follow the bureaucratic tangles, rather it should play a proactive role to ensure a congenial atmosphere," he told The Daily Star.

The last NCC polls were held in 2011. The then EC led by ATM Shamsul Huda played a dynamic role in infusing courage into polling officials and maintaining the law and order situation.

The commission even deployed several EC officials to monitor activities of police and the civil administration, said EC officials.

"But the incumbent commission has in many instances kept mum over irregularities of ruling party men and police," said a senior assistant secretary at the EC.

During a visit to Narayanganj yesterday, Election Commission Zabed Ali told journalists that all necessary measures would be taken for ensuring a level-playing field for all candidates.

The EC faced huge criticism as the upazila parishad elections in 2014, municipality polls in 2015, union parishad elections and the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) polls in 2016 were marred by huge irregularities and violence.

In many cases, it overlooked the irregularities instead of taking action against the criminals, said EC officials.

Police plays the most significant role in holding fair elections. But in the last few elections, police played a biased role, they think.

In the upazila elections in Chandpur, Feni, Satkhira, Munshiganj, Jessore and Tangail, police favoured Awami League-backed candidates in different polling stations, as per news reports.

Police even got locked in heated conversations with election officials and assaulted them on a number of occasions.

On March 15, 2014, the then Hizla Police Station officer-in-charge Nurul Islam in Barisal assaulted upazila Election Officer Zahedul Islam when the latter tried to prevent ruling party men from storming a polling centre.

During municipality polls in Patuakhali, Jessore, Chittagong, Magura and Narail on December 30, police played the role of silent spectators at many voting centres when supporters of the AL mayoral candidates prevented voters from entering polling centres, snatched ballot papers and stuffed those in ballot boxes.

Disappointed, many polling officials expressed inability to stop them as on duty police members were reluctant to take action in the face of high-handedness of the ruling party activists.

One 'shootout' death

FROM PAGE 1

Of them, 22 were traced when they were shown arrested by law enforcers and three others returned to families.

The number of disappearance victims was 48 during the same period last year.

The rising incidents of "shootout" and enforced disappearance have created an atmosphere of panic in the society, rights activists say.

Against this backdrop, the country observes Human Rights Day today.

Nur Khan, acting executive director of ASK, said the number of deaths in "shootout" increased after the July 1 Gulshan terror attack that left 22 people, including 17 foreigners, dead.

A total of 105 people were killed in "shootouts" between July and November and 79 in the first six months of this year, according to ASK.

Besides, 33 people were killed during anti-militant drives between January and November this year.

Nur Khan also said the methods law enforcers apply in many cases to maintain law and order and contain political unrest have created fear among people.

He added militancy has become another threat to human rights as radical groups try to establish their opinion by force.

Some 42 people, including foreigners, police officials, Hindu priests, a Buddhist monk, Christians and gay rights activists, were killed in the last 11 months allegedly by Islamist militants.

"With religious militants on one side and activities of state agencies on the other, space for people's rights is shrinking. As a result, an environment of fear and a culture of impunity are being created in the society," Nur said.

"Such an environment is a threat to democracy and human rights."

He also expressed concern over the attacks on religious minorities, rising number of brutal assaults on women and children and the government's alleged bid to gag the media.

Jyotirmoy Barua, a Supreme Court

lawyer who works on human rights issues, said the tendency of law enforcers to outright deny their involvement in offences is also on the rise. It was seen following the attack on Santals in Gaibandha.

He also observed, "People are not voicing any protest, rather they are accepting all this in fear of false persecution and the possibility of being victims of enforced disappearance."

On the allegations over "shoot-outs", National Human Rights Commission Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque at a press conference on Thursday said, "We were concerned in the past. And we are still concerned."

Law enforcers cannot kill people, he said talking to this newspaper later, adding, "They must be careful about their action."

Kazi Reazul also said militants are violating human rights and curbing people's right to freedom of speech and expression. The government needs to handle radicalism but has to remain cautious so that no innocent people are victimised, he added.

Labour activists

FROM PAGE 2

leave the country. Qatar will pass a law next week that lets workers appeal to the government if their employer stops them leaving the country.

Critics say workers will still find it hard to change jobs or travel.

Gas-rich Qatar is pursuing a \$200 billion infrastructure upgrade and has recruited hundreds of thousands of workers from countries such as India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Foreign workers outnumber the local workforce by nearly 10 to one and can be jailed or deported for forming unions or holding protests.

Fifa was not immediately available for comment. In the past, it has cited plans under discussion to set up a group to monitor working conditions in Qatar.

Dynamites crowned

FROM PAGE 1

The Kings were going well at 59 for one in eight overs and looking to build a base. However, in the 10th over, Mehedi Maruf threw a direct hit from short fine leg and got Sabbir out. They lost their next three wickets for 25 runs and that included the key scalp of Darren Sammy, who was bowled by Shakib in the 14th over after smashing him for a six.

Two wickets each from slow left-armers Sanjamul and Shakib and one from Abu Jayed, brought the Kings down to 93 for six in 15 overs.

Jayed got Mehedi caught at short fine leg in the next over while Dwayne Bravo extended broke the tie with Junaid Khan at the top of the wickets column by bowling Forhad Reza in the 17th for his 21st wicket.

Kesrick Williams had retire hurt after Bravo's throw to run him out off his own bowling, accidentally hit his elbow in the 17th over.

Andre Russel got Nazmul Islam caught behind in the next over before the Dynamites erupted in celebrations on the field.

Earlier, almost all of Dhaka's batsmen batted with a similarly aggressive approach.

Dhaka sent all their hitters and specialist batsmen up front and that led to Shakib Al Hasan batting at eight. The plan yielded mixed results. Dhaka

lost three early wickets but at the same managed to keep their tempo high.

At the end of the seventh over, Dhaka were struggling at 50 for three.

However, a quick-fire 41-run stand in just 4.1 overs between Evin Lewis and Kumar Sangakkara brought them back in the game again. Lewis was the main aggressor in that stand, smashing six fours during the partnership. H particularly enjoyed Afif's bowling, hitting him for three consecutive fours in the 10th over.

Lewis's dismissal for 45 in the 11th over brought Bravo, who maintained the tempo with a four and a six. He was, however, run out in the 13th over.

At 101 for five in 13 overs, Dhaka slowed down a bit and tried to rebuild. In the next three overs they only scored 14 runs and lost the crucial wicket of Russell in the 16th over.

Russel was brilliantly caught at deep cover by Forhad Reza. He first caught the ball, threw it up in the air in the nick of time to avoid touching the boundary rope and then dived back in to complete the marvellous catch.

Forhad then came on to bowl in the death overs and dismissed Shakib with a brilliant yorker.

Dhaka however scored 28 runs, thanks to Sangakkara and Sanjamul Islam, in the last two overs and crossed the 150-run mark.

Bangladeshi women

FROM PAGE 2

Middle East women's rights researcher at the HRW.

Hundreds of thousands of Bangladeshi women are in the Middle East. Over one lakh women have migrated there for work from January to October 2016 alone, said the statement, citing Bangladesh's Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training.

Other domestic workers' countries of origin such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Nepal have vocally denounced abuses abroad and increased protections and salary requirements for their migrant workers, but not Bangladesh.

Begum urged Bangladesh to coordinate with other countries of origin to raise and harmonise minimum salary demands and other protections to benefit all workers.

The global rights watchdog said most country-of-origin embassies in the Middle East provide shelter to domestic workers who flee abusive employers, including while they seek assistance and decide whether to file claims against their employers, but Bangladeshi embassies only offer shelter in some countries, HRW said.

It also urged Bangladesh to ensure its embassies provide shelter and increase capacity to assist such workers.

Most Middle East governments prohibit recruiters from charging migrant workers recruitment fees, whereas Bangladesh allows licensed recruiters to charge women migrant worker recruits up to Tk 20,000 (\$259).

But some Bangladeshi women who spoke to HRW in Oman said they had

paid recruiters up to one lakh Bangladeshi taka (\$1,265) for work abroad.

Citing a July 2016 HRW survey on abuses against migrant domestic workers in Oman, it said dozens of interviewees were from Bangladesh, and almost all of them said their employers had confiscated their passports.

Many said their employers did not pay them their full salaries, forced them to work excessively long hours without breaks or days off, or denied them adequate food and living conditions. Some said their employers had physically assaulted them; a few described sexual abuse.

Bangladeshi workers' accounts of abuse were among the most extreme HRW documented in Oman, including cases amounting to forced labour and trafficking.

Mentioning the *kafala* system, which is applied across the Gulf, HRW said it restricts migrant domestic workers to find a new employer without the current employer's permission, even if their employer is abusive. Labour laws in many of the Middle East countries exclude domestic workers from protections.

HRW also suggested that Bangladesh should ratify the ILO Domestic Worker Convention that requires countries of origin to cooperate with labour-receiving countries to ensure protection of migrant domestic workers.

"Bangladesh should call on Middle Eastern governments to reform their laws and policies to better protect domestic workers," it said. "Migrant domestic workers cook, care, and clean for families in the Middle East, and their rights should be protected."