

Development due to democracy

Says PM, blasts those bemoaning 'lack of democracy' in the country

UNB/BSS

Coming down hard on those who bemoan the "lack of democracy" in the country, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said Bangladesh had been witnessing massive development as there was continuation of democratic process.

"There's been development because there's democracy in the country. As we're running the country in a democratic process, the country has been witnessing development," she said, posing a question why the country could not attain such a level of development in 21 years (when the Awami League was not in power) that it saw over the last eight years.

The Leader of the House said this while taking part in a general discussion on the thanksgiving motion on the president's speech in parliament.

"We believe in democracy and involve all people in each of our activities," she said, adding that her party could not assume office in 2001 as it did not give undertaking for selling gas to a neighbouring country.

"But the BNP-Jamaat clique had done that."

Hasina also questioned how they could criticise the government if there was no freedom of speech and a democratic environment in the country. "What do they want -- development or democracy?"

The premier said her government made open television channels and radio stations in the private sector and those who raise questions about democracy in the country were getting scopes for making criticism.

Even many NGOs working for poverty alleviation by providing microcredit failed to slash poverty rate, she said.

The PM said some banks disbursed microcredit, but how many people could come out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

She added that Brac and Grameen Bank claim that they cut poverty rate by one percent every year. "Brac started work in 1972 and Grameen Bank in 1985. The poverty rate was supposed to go down to zero percent if their claims were true, but why poverty still exists in the country."



WHEN WILL THEY EVER LEARN ... With an auto-rickshaw approaching him, a man tries to get onto a moving bus right in the middle of Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue near Karwan Bazar in the capital yesterday afternoon. He was lucky this time but it can be fatal. Just a couple of weeks ago, a man died in the same area after he got off a bus in the middle of the road and was hit by another bus.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Rare mole rescued in Moulvibazar

MINTU DESHWARA, Moulvibazar

A rare Himalayan mole was rescued from a village in Sreemangal upazila yesterday.

However, the mole was injured while being captured by locals and now receiving treatment at Bangladesh Wildlife Service Foundation in the upazila.

Sopon Deb Sajal, director of the foundation, told this correspondent that locals of Phulcherra village in the upazila spotted a hole in the earthen wall of one Thomas Nasak's house.



As they tried to dig into the hole, the animal came out and scuttled across the yard.

Probably it was afraid seeing a large gathering, he said, adding that the mole got injured while being captured.

The director said the mole weighed 100 grammes and was 4-4.5 inches in length. It has cylindrical body with a short neck. The mole is black and completely covered by velvety fur.

It is found in the central and eastern Himalayas usually between an elevation of 1500 metres and 2400 metres. It mostly eats earthworms and insects and their larvae, Sopon said.

The animal would be released to Lawachhara forest in Moulvibazar after treatment, he said.

Tabibur Rahman, assistant conservator of wildlife management and nature conservation department in Moulvibazar, also confirmed that the mole was rescued from Phulcherra village.

Tania Khan, founding president of Save Our Unprotected Life (SOUL), said the animal was Himalayan mole.

Sharif Jamil, joint secretary of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon (Bapa), said wildlife in locality indicated serious degradation of their habitat.

Forests in Bangladesh have decreased significantly in recent years which are evident from such incidents. There are many cases in which wildlife has been found in the villages near forest, he noted.

SEE PAGE 17 COL 4

'Drug dealers' kill Ansar man in Feni

Magistrate injured during mobile court drive

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Feni

An Ansar member was killed and a magistrate of a mobile court was injured in an attack by "drug dealers" during an anti-narcotic drive along Badapur border of Feni's Phulgazi on Wednesday night.

The dead, Mir Nowshad Ali, 52, is a lance nayek of Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party. He was

SEE PAGE 17 COL 1

Migrant workers in graft mire

FROM PAGE 1

Of the amount, Tk 1,242 crore was sent to Qatar through hundi, Tk 1,229 crore to Singapore, Tk 1,105 crore to Oman, Tk 817 crore to Saudi Arabia, Tk 454 crore to Bahrain, Tk 361 crore to Malaysia, and Tk 27 crore to the UAE.

The TIB report is based on information from government and private institutions and on different media reports from May last year to January this year.

Manzoor E Khoda, TIB programme manager (research and policy), gave details of the irregularities and corruption at various stages in processing the visas.

"The workers had to pay from Tk 5 lakh to Tk 12 lakh each for a Saudi visa whereas the government-fixed rate is only Tk 1.65 lakh," he pointed out.

On average, the workers paid Tk 6 lakh to Tk 8 lakh each for obtaining a Singapore visa, Tk 3.5 lakh to Tk 6.5 lakh each for a Malaysia visa, and Tk 3 lakh to 5 lakh each for Oman and Qatar visas.

Recruiting agents make a net profit of at least Tk 30,000 to Tk 50,000 per visa, said Manzoor, who along with TIB researcher Shahzada M Akram, presented the findings at a press briefing at the TIB head office in the capital.

TIB Executive Director Dr Iftekharuzzaman said the sending of workers abroad is almost entirely controlled by brokers.

"Employers and recruiting agents of the destination countries strike deals with Bangladeshi recruiting agents for visa trade."

Responding to a query, he said the amount of laundered money may go up in future if this "visa trade" cannot be stopped.

He hoped the government would take into consideration the recommendations in the TIB report and take action accordingly.

GRAFT AT VARIOUS STAGES

Applicants had to pay a bribe of Tk 13,000 to 15,000 each for approval of a work visa at the expatriates' welfare ministry that approved 61,122 visas

last year.

They also paid Tk 5,000 to Tk 15,000 each for BMET approval for a Malaysia visa, and Tk 100 to 200 for each visa for other countries. Besides, they had to spend Tk 500 to 1,000 each for police clearance.

The recruiting agents also take extra money from migrant workers in the name of health test and immigration clearance from the BMET, the report said.

"Brokers exploit migrant workers, taking advantage of their ignorance ... As these brokers remain out of accountability or legal action, they easily deceive prospective jobseekers and take extra money from them."

A section of officials at the labour wings of some Bangladeshi missions abroad are also a party to these corrupt practices, it mentioned.

Contacted, Expatriates' Welfare Minister Nurul Islam said he was unaware of the TIB findings. "The TIB didn't contact me," he told The Daily Star.

But Iftekharuzzaman said they sat

with the ministry and discussed the findings on February 12.

Talking to this correspondent, Bangladesh Association of International Recruiting Agencies President Benjir Ahmed said recruiting agents at home and abroad are involved in "visa trade", and this is a major reason behind the high migration cost.

In its report, the TIB observed that the migration sector lacks good governance due to legal, institutional and procedural limitations. The whole labour migration process is complicated, and it takes long to complete. The applicants have to go through 24 to 27 stages for getting visas, immigration clearance and smart cards.

The corruption watchdog recommended that the government amend some clauses of the Overseas Employment and Migrant Welfare Act 2013, bring brokers under a legal framework to hold them accountable, fix compensation for workers five times the migration cost and set up one-stop service centres.

Rain and Mushfiqur keep Sri Lanka at bay

FROM PAGE 1

driving seat with a 182-run first innings lead after getting Bangladesh out for 312 and the rain, which allowed only two balls in the last session, remains Bangladesh's best hope of not losing the first Test and going down 1-0 in the two-match series.

Those two balls were enough to wrap up the innings after tea was taken five minutes early because of insufficient light caused by the onrushing clouds. Skipper Mushfiqur Rahim, with a 161-ball 85, was instrumental in Bangladesh avoiding the follow-on as he built a 106-run partnership with Mehedi Hasan Miraz that took Bangladesh from 192 for six to 298 for seven, with the latter's wicket precipitating a collapse of four wickets for 14 runs.

Mustafizur Rahman was caught freakishly at short leg off Sri Lanka skipper Rangana Herath, with Kusal Mendis looking to evade a hard flick that lodged in his arms, two balls after play resumed. When the Sri Lankan batsmen walked out 10 minutes later, the umpires were coming off due to bad light and an ensuing shower washed out the rest of the session.

Play will start 15 minutes early at 10:15am (Bangladesh time) today, with plans for the teams to make up eight overs per day over the next two days. But with around 20 overs lost despite that measure and with scattered thunder-showers forecast in the morning and afternoon tomorrow, it may be hard for

Sri Lanka to produce a result.

Earlier, the day began as bleakly as it ended for Bangladesh when, after resuming on a healthy 133 for two, half-century Soumya Sarkar departed off the fourth ball he faced on the day. The last ball of the third over of the day, the 49th of the innings, was a short ball from Lakmal that drew a hesitant, half-cock pull from Soumya that was gobbled up at fine leg.

While Mushfiqur was monk-like in his eschewing of risky shots at the other end, Shakib Al Hasan had come in and started attacking the bowling. He was his usual busy self and hit a boundary off Sandakan off the fifth ball he faced, benefiting from a misfield at mid-off from Lahiru Kumara. A kitchen-sink, top-edged pull that went for six over fine leg followed and Shakib was soon on 23 off 18, but he failed to read a googly from Sandakan that landed on middle stump and Shakib followed it down the leg side, feathering an edge that was well taken by keeper Niroshan Dickwella on the move.

Mahmudullah Riyad strode in with the score on 170 for four in the 56th over and hit a classy front-foot punch through cover off the fourth ball he faced. He stuck around for 24 more balls for four more runs. In the 63rd over with the score on 184, Kumara went wide of the crease and delivered a straight ball aimed at the off stump. Riyad, perhaps with

Kumara's pace and the yorker he bowled to him earlier at the back of his mind, stayed rooted to his crease and played inside the line of the ball, which missed the bat and found its target.

Liton Das then played a terrible shot to an innocuous delivery from Rangana Herath, which started outside off stump from around the wicket and stayed well outside after pitching, but Liton threw his hands at it without moving his feet and was caught at slip for five to leave his captain staring into space at the non-striker's end. Bangladesh were then on 191 for six in the 66th over and in real danger of falling short of the follow-on target of 295.

Miraz came in and punished two over-pitched deliveries from Herath through cover and point for four off the front foot, but he too was guilty of over-exuberance when on nine he was deceived by a Sandakan googly and guided the ball to Asela Gunaratne at slip. Fortunately for Bangladesh, that chance was dropped and lunch was soon taken with the score on 213 for six and Mushfiqur maintaining the strictest of vigils on 22 off 84 balls.

Miraz settled down after lunch as Mushfiqur started opening up, showing why he is technically and temperamentally the best batsman Bangladesh have. He hit his first boundary by advancing down the track and hitting a six straight over bowler Herath's head in the fifth ball after the break.

While in the morning he was avoiding the short balls Kumara bowled -- at one stage in the 67th over a 145 kph bouncer hit him flush on the helmet and went for four byes -- Mushfiqur displayed solid command of the hook shot with a hammer blow that raced to the right of square leg in the 77th over bowled by Kumara. He reached his 50 off his 107th delivery with a single in the 79th over.

Miraz was also batting well, following his captain's example. He was given out after an arm-ball from Herath seemed to hit him flush on the pads, but the decision was overturned as replays showed an inside edge. There was no inside edge, however, when he was pinged on the pads while playing on the back foot by Perera with a sharp turner that pitched on middle and straightened. By that time however, he had helped his captain overcome the follow-on target with a 107-run stand to which he contributed a 77-ball 41. In the very next ball, Taskin Ahmed was given out leg-before upon review by the Sri Lankans.

Mushfiqur was on 75 during Perera's double-wicket burst, and hit a defiant down-the-track boundary in Perera's next over, but the cat-and-mouse game of protecting Subashis Roy from the strike proved too much when he stepped out and played against the spin to a Herath arm-ball to be bowled for a courageous and resolute 85.

5 Rid Pharma men must surrender

FROM PAGE 1

passed the order after accepting an appeal filed by the government in January challenging the lower court verdict.

The five accused are Rid Pharma's Managing Director Mizanur Rahman, directors Sheuli Rahman and Abdul Gani, and pharmacists Mahbulul Islam and Enamul Haque.

Assistant Attorney General Bashir Ahmed yesterday told The Daily Star that the five officials will have to surrender to the trial court concerned in seven days after receiving the HC order. He also said the officials can seek bail from the court on surrender.

From June to August in 2009, at least 28 children across the country died of renal failures caused by taking Paracetamol syrup and suspension allegedly manufactured by Rid Pharma.

On July 22, 2009, the Drug Administration sealed off Rid's factory in BSCIC area of Brahmanbaria following wide media coverage of the children's death.

In August the same year, Shafiqul Islam, the then superintendent of Drug Administration, filed the case with the Dhaka Drug Court and only five prosecution witnesses testified after the court indicted the five accused in March 2011.

On November 28 last year, Judge

M Atoar Rahman of the drug court acquitted all the five officials observing that the prosecution utterly failed to prove the charge brought against the accused.

Negligence, inefficiency and incompetence of the Drug Administration in dealing with the case led to the acquittal of all the accused, the judge said in the verdict.

Two officials of Drug Administration involved in the case against Rid Pharmaceuticals knowingly violated due procedure of law, and exhibited sheer negligence, inefficiency and incompetence in dealing with the case, the verdict said.

The two officials are Shafiqul Islam and Altaf Hossain. Both of

them were drug superintendents in 2009. Shafiqul is now an assistant director of the Directorate General of Drug Administration while Altaf is a deputy director, said a DGDA director in December last year.

A day after the verdict pronouncement, Health Minister Mohammed Nasim said if the accused were acquitted due to negligence of the drug administration officials, appropriate actions would be taken against them after receiving the full verdict.

In January, a top official of the DGDA told The Daily Star that no action was taken against the officials as the matter was pending with the HC.

Probe identifies

FROM PAGE 1

Additional DIG Chowdhury Manjul Karim submitted the reports through Deputy Attorney General Motaher Hossain Sazu to the HC bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Krishna Debnath.

Doha-based TV Al Jazeera was first to air a video, apparently shot on mobile phone, showing police members' involvement. The footage, broadcast on December 11, shows a man in a pink T-shirt trying to set a Santal shanty on fire in front of some armed policemen.

Later, a policeman in uniform and another man in a half-sleeve shirt and black pants join the first man. Soon, the shanty catches fire.

The video went viral and local media ran reports based on the footage.

Contacted, DAG Motaher Hossain said the HC did not pass any order since it was satisfied with the government action so far against those involved, including the two cops.

However, the court will give its verdict on a writ petition filed by Ain o Salish Kendra, Brotee and the Association for Land Reform and Development, seeking orders from the court over the incident, he added.

SI Mahbubur was suspended on February 23 and subsequently transferred to Dinajpur Police Lines, police sources said.

Contacted yesterday, Mahbubur protested his innocence and claimed he was a victim of a conspiracy. "Top police officials of Rangpur Range were present there."

On November 6 last year, at least two Santal people were killed and more than 20 others injured in a clash between indigenous people and labourers as well as police at Shahebganj sugarcane farm of Rangpur Sugar Mills in Gobindaganj upazila over a land dispute.

The Daily Star has learnt from old documents that Santals owned most of the land before the government acquired it in the 1950s.

Though the land was acquired for sugarcane farming to produce raw materials for the sugar mill in Gobindaganj, parts of the land were leased out for cultivating other crops, flouting an agreement of 1962.

Meanwhile, community leaders in Joypur and Madarpur villages in Gobindaganj reacted sharply to the police reports.

"Why only two policemen? There were more," Philimon Baske, a community leader, told our Dinajpur correspondent.

"And who directed the two policemen to set fire to Santal houses?" he asked.

He claimed local politicians and policemen of different ranks were involved in the arson attack intended to evict the Santal people.

Nearly 400 policemen were deployed that day. Wearing helmets, some of them started setting fire to Santal houses. Later, some locals and employees of the sugar mill joined them, alleged Rafayel Hasda, another community leader.

Earlier, Gaibandha Chief Judicial Magistrate Mohammad Shahidullah in his report said two policemen, one detective and some locals were directly involved in the arson attack.

The magistrate said he could not identify them because the district police administration did not cooperate.

He had sought the names and designations of the three cops in question to the Gaibandha SP, but he did not provide those.

The SP, Ashrafur Islam, was later transferred to Khagrachhari, following an HC order.