

Govt 'betrayed country, people'

Says BNP about defence deals with India

STAR REPORT

The BNP yesterday alleged that the government "betrayed the country and its people" by signing two defence MoUs with India ignoring public opinion.

"We thought the prime minister wouldn't be inking any defence deal or MoU. According to media reports, she [PM] signed two MoUs on defence cooperation among the 22 deals, keeping the country's people in the dark," said BNP Senior Joint Secretary General Ruhul Kabir Rizvi.

He was speaking at an emergency press conference at the BNP's Nayapalton central office, reports UNB.

The government "weakened the country's security" by signing the defence MoUs, he said.

"Now our defence system has been opened to India. Our independence, existence and sovereignty have been put at stake by signing the defence MoUs. We strongly denounce and protest the move."

Meanwhile, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday said the PM failed to address the country's important issues, including the Teesta water sharing issue, during her tour of India.

Addressing a programme at his Thakurgaon village home, he said people would not accept any treaty that would go against the country's independence and sovereignty.

Important issues like sharing of water of 54 common rivers and stopping border killings did not come up for discussion between the two PMs, he added.

Speaking at another programme in the capital, senior BNP leader Moudud Ahmed demanded the government make public all the deals and MoUs signed with India.

Bangladesh and India yesterday inked 22 documents, including deals and memoranda of understanding (MoUs), on a host of issues, including economy, defence cooperation, power and peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Rizvi said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inked the defence MoUs to "protect India's interests and appease the country as she has been staying in power by force with its help".

He said the Teesta water sharing deal was not signed as the government could not strongly bargain with India for it.

'MAKE DEALS PUBLIC'

BNP standing committee member

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Fighting the onrush of flash flood, locals use bamboos trying to erect a fence for sandbags to save an embankment in Khorsar Haor in Sunamganj's Bishwamvapur on Thursday. However, it was of little use. Most of the Boro fields in the district went under water after heavy rain and the onrush of water from the hills breached embankments causing loss of crops.

PHOTO: MINTU DESHWARA

Warmth flows, water not yet

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resources management, including the sharing of water of common rivers like the Teesta, the Padma-Ganges Barrage Project and basin-wide management of common rivers. I sincerely believe we shall be able to get India's support in resolving these issues expeditiously."

Hasina had face-to-face talks with Mamata at the Hyderabad House but failed to persuade the West Bengal CM to give up her opposition to the Teesta deal. Mamata conveyed her stand to Hasina, diplomatic sources told The Daily Star.

At home, the Bangladesh PM has a vocal opposition that thinks her India visit without the Teesta deal is futile. Moreover, many of her political opponents are sceptic about the defence deal.

The Indian PM said he has had "very productive and comprehensive talks" with Hasina, and the Bangladesh premier described the meeting with her Indian counterpart as "fruitful and productive."

Modi commended Bangladesh government's determination to tackle terrorism and termed Hasina's India visit another Sonali Adhyay (golden era) in the friendship between the people of the two nations.

Recognising that the Teesta pact cannot be done without West Bengal's support, Modi tried to woo Mamata,

saying, "I am very happy that the Chief Minister of West Bengal is my honoured guest today. I know that her feelings for Bangladesh are as warm as my own. I assure you and the people of Bangladesh of our commitment and continuing efforts."

Amidst the warmth of honour given to her by the Indian leadership, the Bangladesh PM seized the opportunity to pick up with them the issues of Bangladesh's huge trade deficit with India and the latter's recent slapping of anti-dumping duty on import of jute goods from Bangladesh.

The Indo-Bangla bilateral trade amounts to \$6.5 billion, of which India's exports account for \$5.3 billion.

Hasina said that in order to bring a balance in trade between the two countries, "We have decided to set up Special Economic Zones (SEZs) for India in Bangladesh on identified locations."

The 22 deals, sealed on the second day of Hasina's four-day state visit, cover a wide range of areas, including defence, civil nuclear cooperation, cyber security, information technology, connectivity, energy and human resource development.

With China and its burgeoning defence supplies to Bangladesh on mind, the Indian PM announced the \$500 million credit line "to support Bangladesh's defence-related procurement" under a MoU, said diplomatic sources.

This is the first such deal between the two countries for purchase of military hardware by Dhaka. The development came hard on the heels of media reports on India's unease over Bangladesh-China defence ties, particularly the recent supply of two Chinese submarines to Bangladesh.

Modi said, "Today, we have also taken a long overdue step by signing an agreement on close cooperation between our armed forces. I am also happy to announce a Line of Credit of US dollars 500 million to support Bangladesh's defence-related procurement. In implementing this line of credit, we will be guided by Bangladesh's needs and priorities."

The two countries signed a deal for cooperation in civil nuclear area that will allow India to help install nuclear reactors in Bangladesh and provide expertise for safety of nuclear power plants. Significantly, this is likely to diversify Bangladesh's dependence on Russia for civil nuclear facilities and create three-way cooperation in the field, according to diplomatic sources.

The Indian PM said Hasina's decision to honour Indian soldiers who laid down their lives in the 1971 Liberation War "has deeply touched the people of India. Every Indian takes pride in the knowledge that Indian soldiers and valiant Muktiyoddhas fought together to liberate

Bangladesh from the reign of terror".

Hasina thanked Modi for his "dynamism and innovative ideas" to direct the bilateral ties. They agreed on the need for greater connectivity between the two countries for the benefit of the people, she said.

Through video conferencing, the two premiers jointly inaugurated a new passenger train and bus service between Khulna and Kolkata, and a cargo train service between Radhikapur in West Bengal and Birol in Bangladesh.

A cargo train carried the first consignment of high-speed diesel from Numaligarh refinery in Assam to Bangladesh.

The Kolkata-Khulna train service will resume in July nearly 70 years after the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947.

Referring to bilateral cooperation in energy security, the Indian PM said, "This is an important dimension of our development partnership." An additional 60MW of electricity would start flowing from India to Bangladesh today, adding to the 600MW already supplied to the latter.

The supply of another 500MW from the existing interconnection had already been committed by India, he said.

"Several agreements for investments in the energy sector in Bangladesh are expected to be signed by Indian compa-

nies in the coming days.

"India will continue to be a willing partner in meeting the energy needs of Bangladesh and its goal of achieving power for all by 2021," Modi added.

Later at night, Dhaka and New Delhi issued a 62-point joint statement.

BRIEFINGS BY TWO FOREIGN SECRETARIES

Indian Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar said India has had defence cooperation with Bangladesh in the past but they were never properly institutionalised in a framework for some reasons.

"It is this lacuna which has been corrected" by yesterday's deal. It was an opportune time to go for it, he said at a media briefing.

Asked what type of military hardware would be supplied to Bangladesh, he said, "I don't think we have come to that point as yet. But we will be guided by their [Bangladesh's] necessity and what they need."

Jaishankar said Bangladesh is seeking Russia's help to build nuclear power plants and the deal with India on civil nuclear cooperation involves training of Bangladeshi personnel and cooperation between the two countries in transfer of technology, supply of components for nuclear power plants in Bangladesh and maintenance of their safety.

The deal between the atomic energy regulatory bodies of the two countries mainly pertains to training of person-

nel, safety and designing of nuclear reactors and plants. Under it, India will also help Bangladesh strengthen its nuclear power capacity.

At a separate press briefing, Bangladesh Foreign Secretary M Shahidul Haque said Dhaka requested New Delhi for conclusion of an interim agreement on Teesta water sharing.

He further said the Indian PM assured of solving the problem arising from his country's slapping anti-dumping tax on imports of jute goods from Bangladesh.

Modi also pledged India's support to Bangladesh's willingness to join a tri-nation road connectivity between India, Myanmar and Thailand, added Shahidul.

The Bangladesh premier arrived in Delhi on Friday. In a special gesture Modi drove to the Palam Air Force Station to receive her.

Yesterday, Hasina was accorded a ceremonial reception by the Indian Army, Navy and Air Force in Modi's presence on the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

She also paid floral tributes at the memorial of Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of the Indian Nation, at Rajghat.

Hasina will visit Ajmer today and offer prayers at the shrine of Sufi saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chisti.

She will meet Indian business leaders tomorrow before returning home.

Another golden era in friendship

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water sharing," he said in a press statement issued yesterday.

Modi also lauded Hasina's leadership in strengthening the ties between the neighbouring nations and in fighting terrorism.

"The extraordinary transformation in our relationship and achievements of our partnership are a clear recognition of your strong and decisive leadership," Modi said, adding that Hasina had been leading Bangladesh on a trajectory of high growth and development.

"We in India rejoice in our ties with Bangladesh. Ties that have been forged in blood and generations of kinship. Ties that seek a better and secure future for our people."

India and Bangladesh share one of the longest land boundaries. During the Indian PM's visit to Dhaka in June 2015, he signed the Land Boundary Agreement and its implementation is now underway.

"Along our shared land boundaries are our shared rivers. They sustain our peoples and their livelihoods. And,

the one that has attracted the greatest attention is the Teesta. This is important for India, for Bangladesh and for India-Bangladesh relationship," Modi said.

"I am very happy that the chief minister of West Bengal is my honoured guest today [yesterday]. I know that her feelings for Bangladesh are as warm as my own. I assure you and the people of Bangladesh of our commitment and continuing efforts."

The partnership between the two countries brought prosperity to their citizens. It also worked to protect them from forces of radicalism and extremism.

"We have the greatest admiration for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's firm resolve in dealing with terrorism. Her government's 'zero-tolerance' policy towards terrorism is an inspiration for all of us," said Modi, pledging that peace, security and development of the two nations would be at the centre of their engagement.

Referring to the defence agreement, he said the leaders had taken a long-overdue step by signing an

agreement on close cooperation between their armed forces, and announced a \$500 million line of credit to support Bangladesh's defence-related procurement.

In implementing this credit, he said India would be guided by Bangladesh's needs and priorities.

"We specifically looked at charting new avenues and tapping fresh opportunities in advancing our relationship. We want to build cooperation in new areas, especially some high-technology areas that have a deeper connection with the youth in both our societies."

The areas, in which the two nations will be co-operating each other, include electronics, information technology, cyber security, space exploration and civil nuclear energy, according to the press statement.

"We are a long-standing and trusted development partner of Bangladesh. India and Bangladesh are also determined that the fruits of our cooperation must benefit our people," Modi said.

Dhaka, Delhi sign 22 deals

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4. On "Audio-visual Co-production" between the governments of Bangladesh and India.

5. For the "Regulation of Motor Vehicle Passenger Traffic" (Khulna-Kolkata route) and SOP of the agreement between Bangladesh and India.

6. For the construction of 36 community clinics in Bangladesh -- a financial agreement between the governments of Bangladesh and India.

MoU

1. On "Defence Cooperation Framework" between the governments of Bangladesh and India.

2. For "Enhancing Cooperation in the Field of Strategic and Operational Studies" between Defence Services Command and Staff College, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh and Defence Services Staff College, Wellington (Nilgiris), Tamil Nadu, India.

3. For "Enhancing Cooperation in the field of National Security, Development and Strategic Studies" between National Defence College, Dhaka, Bangladesh and National Defence College, New Delhi, India.

4. On "Cooperation in the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space" between the

governments of Bangladesh and India.

5. On "Co-operation in the field of Information Technology and Electronics" between Information and Communication Technology Division of Bangladesh and Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology of India.

6. On "Cooperation in the area of Cyber Security" between Bangladesh e-Government Computer Incident Response Team (BGD e-Gov CIRT), Bangladesh Computer Council of Ministry of Post, Telecommunication and IT and Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-In), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, India.

7. On "Establishing Border Haats across the Border between India and Bangladesh" between the governments of Bangladesh and India.

8. On "Bilateral Judicial Sector Cooperation" between the governments of Bangladesh and India.

9. On "Training and Capacity Building Programme for Bangladeshi Judicial Officers in India" between the Supreme Court of Bangladesh and the National Judicial Academy, India.

10. Concerning "Cooperation on

Aids to Navigation" between Department of Shipping, Ministry of Shipping, Bangladesh and Directorate General of Lighthouses and Lightships (DGLL), Ministry of Shipping, India.

11. On "Mutual Scientific Cooperation in the field of Earth Sciences for Research and Development" between Geological Survey of Bangladesh (GSB) and Geological Survey of India (GSI).

12. MoU & SOPs on Passenger and Cruise Services on the Coastal and Protocol Route between the governments of Bangladesh and India.

13. On "Development of Fairway from Sirajganj to Daikhowa and Ashuganj to Zakiganj on Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route" between Ministry of Shipping, Bangladesh and Ministry of Shipping, India.

14. On "Cooperation in the Field of Mass Media" between the governments of Bangladesh and India.

15. For extending "Defence LOC" (Line of Credit) of \$500 million between Bangladesh and India.

16. For "Extending a 3rd Line of Credit (LoC)" by India to Bangladesh between the governments of Bangladesh and India.

'Like nowhere else'

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reflect the quality of a player as is the case in Test or ODI.

But Hassan, who is increasingly becoming the head and shoulder of Bangladesh cricket, refused to stick to a particular point on an issue that was settled just before the Tigers' first T20 match against Sri Lanka at the R Premadasa Stadium in Colombo, where Bangladesh's inspirational limited-overs captain Mashrafe announced his retirement from the T20 format upon completion of the two-match series.

Sitting alongside Mashrafe and Test captain Mushfiqur Rahim during an impromptu press conference, Hassan actually dropped a bombshell while responding to a question on his thoughts

about Mashrafe's retirement decision.

"One thing I'm repeatedly telling you is that Mashrafe has not quit T20 cricket or we have not said something like that he is not in the T20 squad. He quit the T20 captaincy. If he is fit he will play. If he says he will not play but if we need him, do you think we will let him go?" Hassan said forcefully, leaving the audience in a bit of confusion and Mashrafe in a spot of bother.

We don't want to believe that it was publicity stunt from Hassan, who is also a ruling party lawmaker. After all he was talking about a player the watching world knows to have played his last T20 on Thursday.

Dear president, Mashrafe never said he was quitting the T20 captaincy. He said he was retiring from T20 cricket.

And there was no ambiguity in Mashrafe's decision. If there is any cloud regarding that decision, it lies with the board. It's a shame that the BCB is yet to come out with an official statement regarding Mashrafe's retirement, which is not only a standard norm but a courtesy to a cricketer who served Bangladesh cricket with utmost dedication.

The BCB boss nowadays talks about the technicalities of the game, selecting or dropping a player. He is even enthusiastic to poke his nose in a dressing room discussion. He is constitutionally authorized to do whatever he feels like 'for the greater interest of Bangladesh cricket.'

Hassan is correct by pointing out that he has not seen such an outcry

anywhere else in the world following a players' decision to retire from T20 cricket. But world cricket has also hardly seen such an overpowering board president. Not many know who are the presidents of ECB, Cricket Australia, Cricket South Africa or New Zealand Cricket. World cricket has also not witnessed an instance when a board president proudly announced that he has selected or omitted a player. It's not that Bangladesh cricket does not have a selection panel to take care of the selection issue, a CEO to speak for the board on regular issues or chairman of cricket operations. But they are just puppets to an all-consuming president unique in world cricket.

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The owner Solaiman Ali and his son Mozaffar Ali, who were near the scene, disappeared as the shocked villager started screaming.

The incident happened in Sheikh Haat village of Rangpur's Badarganj upazila.

On information from locals, police recovered the body of Akram, a student class-VI, and sent it to Rangpur Medical College morgue for autopsy.

"We are searching for Solaiman and Mozaffar. We suspect it was a murder," said Aktaruzzaman, officer-in-charge of Badarganj Police Station, adding that there were marks of torture all over Akram's body and his hands were tied together.

When The Daily Star correspondent called Solaiman in the afternoon and asked about Akram's death, he said, "The boy committed suicide," and hung up. His phone was unreachable then on.

The victim's father Ashraf Ali said his son worked at the restaurant to support his studies.

"His daily wage was Tk 130. Since Solaiman didn't pay him in the last seven days, he must have asked for the money," said the grieving father.

Quoting other employees of the restaurant, the OC said Solaiman and his son lost their temper when the boy asked for Tk 910.

As the boy insisted, they began to beat him up, he added.

Killed for Tk 910?