

# Dhaka, Thimphu

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Tobgay said his country was looking into the matter to see how it could address the environmental concerns to make the BBIN initiative effective.

The Bhutanese premier called for joint management of sub-regional water, especially with Bhutan, Bangladesh and India.

About the Bimstec, he said there was a huge potential of the regional grouping. "We strongly support the Bimstec and sub-regional cooperation could be further strengthened through it."

About the importance and bright potential of hydropower, the Bhutanese PM said: "Hydropower could be a 'game changer' in this region. Once the initiative is implemented, power would be generated in Bhutan and then could be transmitted to the three countries."

Hasina reiterated her offer of allowing Bhutan to use Chittagong and Mongla seaports as well as the Saidpur Airport for increasing its trade and commerce.

About tourism, the Bhutanese PM said they would send a delegation to Bangladesh to assess how to establish a tourism corridor centring Cox's Bazar and Kuakata and thus explore the potential.

Hasina apprised Tobgay of her government's recent initiative to declare March 25 as the "Genocide Day" and sought Bhutan's support for getting international recognition for it.

The foreign secretary said deals signed between the two countries would further facilitate trade and commerce and thus boost the bilateral ties.

Bhutan offered a piece of land to Bangladesh for constructing its own embassy building in Thimphu, he added.

Hasina urged Bhutan to strike a balance in bilateral trade as it was tilted in favour of Bhutan.

Tobgay also sought FDI from Bangladesh, especially in the ICT sector, saying that some Bangladeshi software companies already made their footprint in Bhutan and their experience was good.

Responding to the Bhutanese PM's request to address the delay in land customs at Burimari Land Port, Hasina assured that her government would take necessary steps in this regard.

About the scope for appointment of Bangladeshi doctors in Bhutan, Tobgay said foreign doctors in Bhutan could get up to \$3,000 per month apart from their living expenditure. "If the Bangladeshi doctors feel encouraged, they'll have the scope for working in Bhutan."

Tobgay informed Hasina that some 123 Bhutanese medical students were studying in Bangladesh with scholarships. He sought extension of such facilities for the Bhutanese students.

Hasina said seats could be reserved for the Bhutanese students at Rangpur

Medical College and other academic institutions in Bangladesh.

The foreign secretary said Tobgay expressed satisfaction over the renewal of the agreement on cultural exchange between the two countries.

About the proposed fibre optic connectivity between Bangladesh and Bhutan via India, the Bhutanese PM proposed that a discussion be held among the three countries.

Hasina also thanked Tobgay for organising an international conference on autism.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, PM's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi and PMO Senior Secretary Suraiya Begum were present, among others, at the meeting.

Later, the Bangladesh PM attended a state banquet at the Royal Banquet Hall hosted by the Bhutanese premier.

### FIVE DEALS SIGNED

An MoU was inked between the Agriculture and Food Regulatory Authority of Bhutan and Bangladesh's Department of Agricultural Extension.

The two countries inked another MoU on the use of inland waterways for transportation of bilateral trade and transit cargoes.

The third MoU was signed between Bhutan Standards Bureau and Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution (BSTI).

The two countries inked an agreement on avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income.

Another agreement was signed between the two sides on cultural cooperation.

### HASINA ACCORDED RECEPTION

The Bangladesh PM was accorded a gala reception by Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck and Queen Jetsun Pema at Tashichho Dzong, the Royal Palace, in Thimphu yesterday.

On her arrival at the Royal Palace in the afternoon, Hasina was received and later escorted into the palace by a cabinet minister and senior Bhutanese officials. She was later given a guard of honour.

The PM had an audience with the Bhutanese king and queen.

Foreign Secretary Shahidul Haque and PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told reporters that the PM spent some time with the king and queen exclusively.

PM's daughter Saima Wazed Hossain, Sheikh Rehana's son Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby and his wife and children were present.

### ARRIVAL IN BHUTAN

A red carpet was rolled out as the Bangladesh PM arrived at Paro International Airport in Bhutan on a three-day state visit.

Bhutanese PM Tshering Tobgay and Bangladesh Ambassador in Thimphu Jishnu Roy Choudhury received Hasina at the airport. Two children presented bouquets to the PM.

At the airport, Hasina was given a guard of honour by a smartly turned out contingent of the Bhutanese armed forces. The PM took salute and inspected the guard.

From the airport, Hasina was taken to Hotel Le Meridien Thimphu.

The Bhutanese capital was decorated with flags of Bangladesh and Bhutan and large portraits of Hasina, the Bhutanese king and the country's PM.

## Vogue model's

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the medical board on the opinion of the magistrate, he said.

Asmaul also said the second autopsy was necessary because Raudha's family rejected the first autopsy report that said the model and medical student from Maldives committed suicide.

Raudha Athif, a 2nd year student of Islami Bank Medical College in Rajshahi city, was found dead at her dormitory on March 29.

The 21-year-old, who was featured in the cover of Vogue India magazine as a model, was buried at Hetomkhan Graveyard in Rajshahi city on April 1.

Police recorded an unnatural case filed by the college authorities on the day of her death, while her father Mohamed Athif lodged a murder case on April 10 with a Rajshahi court accusing one of her classmates and demanding a fresh autopsy.

Later, the murder case was handed over to the CID.

## Students

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angry and were suspecting religious fanatics were behind it, some students claimed responsibility.

"We did it in protest, but we are being misunderstood," said Emran Hossain Anik, a final-year student of ceramics and sculpture department.

Yusuf Ali, a final-year student of the same department, said, "After this incident, the authorities will hopefully pay attention for preserving our works."

Prof Mostafijur Rahman, dean of RU's Faculty of Fine Arts, said, "It was not a big deal. Some dissatisfied students did it to express their anger, and they should go to the authorities before doing such a thing."

Prof Siddhartha Shankar Talukder, a teacher of ceramics and sculpture department, said damaging the sculptures and dislodging those were alike. "This incident will add fuel to the fundamentalists' activities against sculptures and art works."

*Our RU correspondent contributed to this report.*

## UK PM

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Speaking outside her Downing Street residence in London, May warned that "division in Westminster will risk our ability to make a success of Brexit".

She said parliament would be asked to vote today to decide on whether or not to hold an election.

May justified her change of heart, saying: "I concluded the only way to guarantee certainty and security for years ahead is to hold this election."

The dramatic announcement caps nearly a year of tumult in British politics following the Brexit vote in June 2016 that included the resignation of May's predecessor David Cameron and her rapid rise to power last year.

A round of opinion polls over the Easter weekend also showed her Conservative Party far ahead of the main opposition Labour Party.

The Conservatives polled at between 38 percent and 46 percent, with Labour at 23 percent to 29 percent, according to the polls by YouGov, ComRes and Opinium.

The poll lead had prompted many senior Conservatives to call for an election, particularly as May will need a strong parliamentary majority as she seeks to negotiate Brexit.

The Conservatives currently have a majority of just 17 from the last election in 2015 and some of their MPs have indicated they could vote against the government on key aspects of Brexit legislation.

"Our opponents believe because the government's majority is so small that our resolve will weaken and that they can force us to change. They are wrong," May said yesterday.

**DAMAGING CUTS**  
The EU said yesterday it did not expect negotiating guidelines for Britain's exit from the bloc to be affected by the British government's call for an early general election.

"The UK elections do not change our EU27 plans," said Preben Aamann, spokesman for Donald Tusk, president of the European Council of the remaining 27 member states.

"We expect to have the Brexit guidelines adopted by the European Council on 29 April and, following that, the Brexit negotiating directives ready on 22 May," Aamann told AFP.

"This will allow the EU27 to start negotiations," he added.

EU leaders except May are set to hold a summit on April 29 where they will agree on the strategy for negotiating Britain's expected departure in 2019.

The negotiations themselves are not expected to start until May or June at the earliest.

The European Commission has said it wants the exit talks to be concluded by October 2018 at the latest and stressed in an initial reaction to May's shock announcement that the plans were unchanged.

Britain's next election was due to have been held in 2020 -- a date enshrined in legislation according to which elections have to be held every five years in May.

But the law can be overruled if two-thirds of lawmakers in the British parliament vote in favour of early elections -- and main opposition Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn said yesterday he would back May's call.

"Labour will be offering the country an effective alternative to a government that has failed to rebuild the economy, delivered falling living standards and damaging cuts to our schools and NHS," he said in a statement.

"We look forward to showing how Labour will stand up for the people of Britain."

## Verdict

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prove the charges. They prayed for acquittal of their clients.

Moslem of Kamarhati village in Nikli upazila was arrested on July 7, 2015 after the tribunal issued an arrest warrant for the duo. On the other side, Hussain left for Malaysia on May 21, 2014 and investigation began on November 13 that year, according to the tribunal's investigation agency.

Hussain was originally from Machihata village (Pir Bari) in Brahmanbaria Sadar upazila but had been living with his family in Kishoreganj Sadar upazila since 1936 as his father worked there, according to the investigators.

His father, Syed Musleh Uddin, was vice-president of the then East Pakistan unit of Pakistan Democratic Party (PDP) and chairman of the Peace Committee in Kishoreganj sub-division in 1971, the investigators added. Both PDP and Peace Committee worked against Bangladesh's independence.

Hussain was the commander of the Razakar force in Nikli upazila and was known as "Razakar Daroga", while his brother Syed Hassan commanded the Razakars in Tarail upazila. Moslem was a Razakar member and Hussain's associate, according to the prosecution.

The tribunal on May 9 last year framed charges against the duo and the prosecution produced 23 witnesses to prove the charges. The defence produced one witness.

# Projects turn into plights

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The farmers along with the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), local lawmakers and rights activists have blamed it on the WDB and the contractors, as the incomplete embankments could not save their Boro cultivation this year like the previous years.

Locals said the disaster could be avoided or, at least, minimised by manifolds if the repair and construction of the embankments in the haor areas were completed in time.

According to the WDB, two types of projects have been launched by the department to build and repair the embankments. This year, 76 projects have been taken up for re-sectioning of submersible embankments in different haors of Sunamganj, while another 238 projects were approved for as many Project Implementation Committees (PICs).

Both types of projects were supposed to be completed by this February 28, but the WDB extended the date to March 31.

More than 50 percent work of the PIC projects have been completed, while the projects under contractors were apparently in a mess as most of them did not even start the work and some others completed 30 to 50 percent.

However, farmers, rights activists and locals claim neither the projects of contractors nor the PICs started their work in time and could barely complete 10 to 20 percent of the work. They also claim the high officials of the WDB's Sylhet and Sunamganj offices' corruption is another big reason behind this.

According to DAE, 166,000 hectares of land was cultivated during this Boro season. Of the cultivated land, approximately 133,000 hectares of land submerged, causing huge loss to 250,000 farmers.

However, the farmers in the haor areas claim they have lost the season's cultivation.

Jahedul Haque, deputy director of DAE Sunamganj, told The Daily Star that the work of the embankments needed to be completed before March, but neglect by the WDB and the contractors caused the massive damage to the only Boro cultivation of the year.

Mouazzam Hossain Ratan, lawmaker of Sunamganj-1 constituency, told The Daily Star that local contractors backed by political leaders were responsible for the farmers' miseries.

The MP alleged that Khairul Huda Chapal, president of Sunamganj district unit Juba League, president of Sunamganj Chamber of Commerce and Industries and brother of Sunamganj Zilla Parishad Chairman

Nurul Huda Mukut, Sajib Ranjan Das, vice-president of Sunamganj Chamber, and some other local contractors along with a section of WDB officials are mainly responsible for everything.

He added they have barely completed 10 percent of their designated work.

"I myself am a son of a farmer. I know the farmers will suffer for next three years as they have lost their only crop because of the neglect by the contractors and the Water Development Board officials," the lawmaker said, adding, "They do not work but always get the money from the projects."

He also alleged that local contractors have created a syndicate in connivance with the contractors from outside and had the contracts taken by the outsiders by sharing the benefits.

Contacted, Sajib Ranjan Das, contractor of nine projects of building embankments 89.09 kilometres in length, said he had completed around 50 percent of his work before the flash flood hit the haor areas.

Denying the allegations, he said the WDB had delayed in handing over some project areas.

Khairul Huda Chapal, contractor of three projects, said the PICs were mainly responsible for the loss and the project of re-sectioning of submersible embankment projects requires a long time. He added these projects mostly include new areas to build the embankments.

Sanjay Roy Chowdhury, chairman of Jayashree Union Parishad under Dharmapasha upazila and president of a PIC, said the committee's work was not responsible for the flash flood as the river overflowed and the water went beyond the safety level of the embankments.

Contacted, Abdul Hai, acting chief engineer of WDB, Sylhet, said the huge workload needed enough time for pre-procedure of the projects, but it had to be delayed for official reasons during evaluation and handing over the sites.

He put the blame on natural calamities and said the embankments were supposed to be 6.5 metres in height, but this year the floodwater flowed over 8.1 metres.

He admitted that some of the contractors and PICs could not start the work in time and most of them could not even complete the projects.

Denying the allegation of corruption, he said the WDB is in no way related to any kind of graft and they barely gave 15 to 16 percent of the fund to some contractors and 50 to 55 percent to the PICs.

He, however, said three committees have been formed by the ministry, board and the Anti-Corruption Commission to unearth corruption, if there is any.

# It's a plot

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Metropolitan Police.

However, Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, a platform for commuters, said private operators withdrew some 40 percent of their buses over the last three days, causing immense public suffering.

Amid this, Roads and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader expressed his helplessness.

"What can I do? If someone keeps this buses off the road showing various excuses, can we bring them back on the street forcibly?" he told reporters at the secretariat.

"Those in the transport sector are no ordinary people. Many of them are very influential ... The current situation in the transport sector can be described as noting but anarchy," he said.

Asked, Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association Secretary General Khondaker Enayet Ullah said bus owners, who did not have fitness certificates and valid documents for their vehicles, kept those off the roads.

"What can we do?" he said, adding that the drive must go on.

Meanwhile, the bus owners' association is expected to meet officials of the BRTA to discuss the ongoing drive at 4:00pm today.

On the third day of the drive yesterday, BRTA mobile courts filed 140 cases on different grounds, which include charging extra fare.

They fined bus operators Tk 4.38 lakh, sent two drivers to jail for not having driving licences and dumped two buses for not having fitness certificates.

Talking to The Daily Star, several passengers expressed frustration about the anarchy on the streets.

"Is there anyone to see our problem? We're tired of this drama," said Lubna Haque, a private banker.

Over the last three days, Lubna, who lives at Wari, suffered badly commuting between her home and office.

"On the first day [Sunday], there was no problem going to the office, but on the way back, there were a few buses for the huge number of people waiting to go home," she said.

In the last two days, she failed to get any bus even after waiting for about an hour. So she took auto-rickshaws,

which cost her way beyond her budget.

Recently, the BRTA and the transport owners announced that no public transport would operate in the city in the name of "special" services from Sunday.

The same day, the BRTA launched the drive against the services with which bus operators have long been charging passengers extra.

In the last two days, many of the bus owners operated buses as "local service" and yet charged extra fare, said Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity Secretary General Mozammel Haque Chowdhury.

"If the practice of charging extra fare cannot be stopped now, it will become normal," he said, adding that bus operators are forcing people to pay high fare.

Contacted, Mashiur Rahman Ranga, state minister for rural development and cooperatives, said owners might have withdrawn buses fearing the drive.

"I called upon them to operate their buses," said Ranga, also president of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association.

# Arrest order

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representatives backed by the BNP and the Jamaat-e-Islami.

In recent years, several mayors, upazila chairmen and vice chairmen loyal to the BNP and the Jamaat were suspended after they had been indicted in similar criminal cases.

Using the law, the government has recently suspended two pro-BNP mayors of Rajshahi and Sylhet city corporations, Mosaddek Hossain Bulbul and Ariful Huq Chowdhury, twice.

Pro-BNP city mayors of Gazipur MA Mannan and Moniruzzaman Moni of Khulna were suspended as well.

However, all of them regained their mayoral posts as court stayed their suspension orders.

The country has 11 city corporations, of which the mayors of six belong to the BNP while the others are backed by the ruling Awami League.

Resigning from his post on February 8 for contesting for a second term, BNP sponsored mayoral candidate Shakoo defeated ruling Awami League candidate Anjum Sultana Shima in the March 30 city polls by over 10,000 votes.

the EC yesterday issued a gazette notification, paving the way for his taking oath as the Comilla city mayor.

About Shakoo's oath taking, a senior official of LGRD ministry had told The Daily Star that the ministry would make preparations for the oath taking ceremony after the issuance of the gazette.

About the arrest warrant for Shakoo, his personal assistant Kabir Hossain Mazumder told this newspaper that the BNP leader had already obtained permanent bail from High Court in the case.

Yesterday, Judge Kamrul Hossain Molla of the Senior Special Judge's Court passed the order after accepting charges brought against Shakoo.

The court, however, dismissed the charges against Shakoo's wife.

The court directed the officer-in-charge of Ramna Police Station to submit by May 9 an execution report on the arrest warrant against the BNP leader.

Shahin Ara Momtaz, an assistant director of the Anti-Corruption Commission, filed the case against the mayor and his wife with Ramna Police Station on January 7 of 2008, for their alleged involvement in amassing Tk 4.57 crore illegally and concealing

wealth statement of Tk 1.12 crore.

Later, they got a "limited term" bail from the HC on different dates.

Talking to The Daily Star, Additional Public Prosecutor Taposh Kumar Paul said Shakoo got bail from the HC on July 2 of 2009 for eight weeks and later on April 28 of 2010, his bail was extended for six months.

However, Shakoo did not submit any petition to any court for extending the bail again. So, the bail was cancelled in 2010, he said.

On August 13 of 2008, Afroza Jasmine gave a statement before a magistrate. She claimed that the money which was found in her accounts was deposited by her husband, Taposh said.

After an investigation, Shahin Ara Momtaz submitted a charge sheet against Shakoo on February 4 last year as the charges brought against him were found to be true.

She, however, appealed to the court to relieve his wife as the charge against her was not proved.

According to the charge sheet, Shakoo acquired Tk 4, 57,73,933 illegally and concealed wealth statement of Tk 1,12,40,120 to the ACC and he deposited Tk 3 crore in his wife's accounts.

# N Korea renews threat

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for its sixth nuclear weapons test. Vice Foreign Minister Han Song-Ryol said that its programme would only escalate.

"We'll be conducting more missile tests on a weekly, monthly and yearly basis," Han told the BBC in an interview, threatening "all-out war" if the US took any action against it.

Arriving in Tokyo for talks with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, Pence hailed the two countries' longstanding security ties.

"The alliance between the United States and Japan is the cornerstone of peace and security in Northeast Asia," he told Abe.

The Japanese leader called for a peaceful resolution to the North Korea tensions but did not rule out the need for tough measures, reported AFP.

"It is a matter of paramount importance for us to seek diplomatic efforts as well as peaceable settlements of the issue," he said.

"At the same time dialogue for the sake of dialogue is valueless and it is necessary for us to exercise pressure."

US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said yesterday the failed North Korean missile test over the weekend was an attempt by the reclusive country to "provoke something," pledging that the United States will work with China to reduce tensions.

Speaking with reporters on his way to the Middle East, Mattis said the most recent test was not an intercontinental ballistic missile but still a reckless move, reported Reuters.

"It shows why we are working so closely right now with the Chinese... to try to get this under control and aim for the denuclearized Korean peninsula," Mattis said.

**GOTTA BEHAVE**  
Throughout his bareknuckle election campaign, Trump repeatedly called into question a mutual

defence treaty between Japan and the United States, suggesting Tokyo should pay for its own security.

But Pence reassured his jittery hosts that those decades-old security commitments are ironclad, a necessity made more acute after Washington's refusal to rule out military action against the North.

Tensions between Pyongyang and Washington have soared in recent weeks as a series of North Korean missile tests have prompted ever-more-severe warnings from Trump's administration.

Asked by a reporter what message he had for North Korea's young leader Kim Jong-Un on Monday, Trump replied "Gotta behave".

North Korea's deputy ambassador to the United Nations reiterated on the weekend that the North is ready to respond to any US missile or nuclear strike.

"If the United States dares opt for a military action... the DPRK is ready to react to any mode of war desired by the Americans," Kim told a news conference, using the abbreviation of the country's official name.

Like South Korea, Japan already faces a direct threat from the secretive regime.

In early March, the North simultaneously fired four ballistic missiles off its east coast, three of which fell provocatively close to Japan, in what it said was a drill for an attack on US bases in the country.

The Pentagon has not discussed which missile blew up after the North's launch on Sunday from a base near Sinpo on its east coast, and the White House has said only that it was a medium-range device.

But John Schilling from the 38 North monitoring group said the failure was indicative of the test of a new and hitherto unknown system being developed by Kim Jong-Un's regime.

# One of four missing

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city, according to their families and friends.

Sujon and Mahedi are friends too and hailed from the same village in Barisal, their family members said.

A week before their disappearance, Mahedi had come to the capital for a job interview.

Police said they collected CCTV camera footage of a Banani restaurant where the four had snacks together just before they went traceless.

Yesterday, Mahedi told this correspondent that his friend Sujon took him to the restaurant that day and introduced him to the two other youths.

Coming out of the restaurant, he and Sujon were looking for a rickshaw. Suddenly, some men appeared there and forced him into a vehicle. He became unconscious immediately.

As he regained consciousness, he found himself blindfolded at an unknown place.

Mahedi said he didn't know what happened to his friend and the two other youths.

Yesterday morning, he woke up and found that his blindfold was not there. He was lying under a tree in Nabinagar

area of Savar on the outskirts of the capital.

He also found Tk 600 in his pocket. Later, he went to Nabinagar bus stand and boarded a bus to Barisal.

Mahedi reached his village in Babuganj upazila around 4:00pm. His neighbours said he looked sick and disturbed.

Later, Mahedi was taken to Babuganj Police Station for interrogation, said sources there.

Mahedi's father Jahangir Hossain, a constable at Jhalakathi Sadar Police Station, told this correspondent that they were very happy to reunite with his son. "Now, I want to see those who took away my son face justice."