



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina calls on her Swedish counterpart Stefan Lofven in Sweden yesterday. Story on Page 20.

INCREASING EXCISE DUTY ON BANK DEPOSIT

Matia raps Muhith

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury in parliament yesterday criticised Finance Minister AMA Muhith for increasing excise duty on bank deposits.

"Taking part in a discussion on the proposed budget for 2017-18 fiscal, Matia called upon the finance minister to scrap the proposal.

"I didn't understand why the finance minister took the initiative [increasing excise tax]. The government will lose only Tk 355 crore if the total proposal is withdrawn. This amount is nothing for the finance minister," she said, adding, "How we will make people rich [if we increase excise tax on bank deposits]?"

According to the proposed budget placed in parliament on June 1, any bank account with a balance between Tk 1 lakh and Tk 10 lakh may be slapped with a Tk800 excise duty at any time of a year.

Pointing to the budget proposal on cutting interest rate on saving certificates, Matia said International Monetary Fund is giving suggestions to reduce the interest rate.

"But who are they [IMF]? They are the international organisation who opposed financing in the Padma Bridge, opposed to give subsidy in fertiliser and farm products."

Matia also said IMF is a failed organisation. IMF is facing trial in different countries. "Countries who followed their suggestions blindly had fallen in danger. I oppose their suggestions." Matia also called upon Muhith not to cut interest rates on savings certificates.

Taking part in the budget discussion in parliament since June 7, almost all lawmakers from treasury and opposition bench sharply criticised Muhith for proposal of increasing excise tax on bank deposits and reducing interest rates on savings certificates. Pointing to loan defaulters, Matia said, "If we can bear the burden of loan defaulters, why will we not be able to take the responsibility of lower and middle income people?"

Khaleda calls upon journo to unite for press freedom

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Alleging that oppression is prevailing upon the press in the country, BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has called upon journalists to unite for its freedom.

"The government has been oppressing journalists and media through various methods," she said in a statement.

"All the media in the country are currently in fear of repression... I'm calling upon journalists to unite for press freedom and restore democracy..." she said.

The BNP chief issued the statement marking June 16 as "Black Day" for press freedom in Bangladesh.

Khaleda claimed that the then government on this day in 1975 shut down all newspapers except four loyalists.

"She alleged that after the Liberation War, the then ruling party introduced a

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TRAGEDY IN HILLS

UN to support victims

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Expressing solidarity with families affected by the landslides in Southeastern region of the country, the United Nations System in Bangladesh has assured that it would support remains of services and provide emergency supplies to the affected.

In a statement yesterday, it said the UN remains concerned about the loss of lives, livelihoods, and damage to homes and infrastructures in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar.

It said the disruption of road links and telephone communications within the affected areas are hampering the relief response, but, in a statement yesterday, it said the UN remains concerned about the loss of lives, livelihoods, and damage to homes and infrastructures in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) are also conducting assessments and helping with the response.

The UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh Robert D Watkins has expressed solidarity with the landslides victims, and has assured the government that the UN System would continue to support ongoing efforts aimed at restoring services and providing emergency supplies to the affected.

Meanwhile, Japanese Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida has expressed deep shock at the recent tragedy. In a message to Bangladesh Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, Kishida expressed condolence at the loss of lives and properties in the devastating landslides in Bangladesh, according to a foreign ministry press release yesterday.

REMOVING ILLEGAL HOUSES ON HILLS

Political structures won't be tolerated

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cg

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said no political interference would be tolerated during removal of risky dwellings built illegally on hills in Chittagong city.

He made the remark after visiting Lalkhan Bazar, Motijhama, and Batali Hill areas in the city, where most of the people vulnerable to landslides live.

"People living on the hills are putting their [own] lives in danger. Now it is a matter of lakhs of lives. If anybody tries to exert political influence during removal of the illegal slums, they would be dealt with strongly," he told the media.

The Chittagong district administration and environmentalists claim that they were having difficulties removing the illegal structures at the foot and on the slopes of hills due to interferences from politically influential quarters.

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KILLERS OF BANGABANDHU

US, Canada law firms hired to bring back fugitives

HOME MINISTER TELLS JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has appointed two law firms in the US and Canada for bringing the fugitive convicted killers of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman back home. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal told parliament yesterday.

In reply to lawmakers' queries, he said as part of legal procedures to bring back the killers, the government started confiscating their non-movable properties and freezing their bank accounts.

He said the government formed a taskforce led by the law minister in 2010 in this regard.

Earlier, Law Minister Anisul Hossain said the government has so far traced two convicts - Nur Chowdhury in Canada and Rashed Chowdhury in the US.

The absconding killers of Bangabandhu are Khandaker Abdur Rashid.

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Vendors occupy a large portion of a footpath and walk on the busway's Gullistan area. As a result, pedestrians are being forced to walk on the busy road. Despite numerous drives by the authorities concerned to free the footpaths in the area from the hawkers during office hours, they are back in business with the Eid approaching. The photo was taken yesterday around 1:00pm.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



An embarrassed man and a woman look at a bede wome (gypsy) helplessly as the latter holds the man by his shirt and demands money. Most of the members of the bede community now extort pedestrians or people waiting in traffic on city streets. Snake charming, their primary profession, is now on the decline with the advent of modern entertainment. They also used to make a living by selling various items including glass bangles and charms and providing unconventional healing services. The photo was taken from New Market area in the capital on Wednesday.

PHOTO: RAKESH SHIMRON

No headway in N'ganj AL office bomb attack cases in 16 years

THROUGH 16 years, we have passed since filing of cases over a bomb attack carried out on this day on the Awami League office at Chashara in Narayanganj, the victims are still awaiting justice.

The attack left 20 people dead and injured over 50 others.

Twelve years after the incident, charges were framed against six people in two separate cases. One was over the killing and another for the explosion in connection with the attack.

Police also cleared 31 people, including district BNP President Advocate

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Rohingyas may pose threat to national security

Foreign minister tells parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Illegal Rohingyas may pose a threat to Bangladesh's national security in future, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali told parliament yesterday.

"Among the Cox's Bazar population, 20-25 percent people are now Rakhine Muslims. Such huge Rakhine Muslims may become a threat to national security in the future," he said in reply to lawmakers' queries.

In a scripted answer, the minister said Myanmar intruders are harming Bangladesh in terms of social, economic, political and environmental aspects. "They're contributing to a law and order slide by engaging in various misdeeds. They are also putting a negative influence on our overseas labour market."

He went on saying, "The Rakhine people have got engaged in various misdeeds, including drug smuggling, arms and human trafficking and manufacturing drug on the border... they've become a national security concern for Bangladesh." The minister said some 33,000 Rohingyas, registered as refugees, are living in two camps run by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) in

Cox's Bazar. "But it is estimated that some three to four lakh unregistered Myanmar citizens have been staying in five districts, including Cox's Bazar," he added.

Mahmood Ali said some 75,000 Myanmar citizens had entered Bangladesh afresh since October 2016 following military drives in Rakhine state.

The Muslim community was subjected to massive repression in Rakhine following the military drives after attack on a Myanmar border post in 2016. So, a large number of Muslim nationalists from Myanmar started entering Bangladesh illegally, he said.

The minister said though Bangladesh urged Myanmar to take back its citizens on several occasions, it did not pay any heed to the call.

The Myanmar authorities also do not consider the Rakhine Muslims as their citizens, he added. He said Bangladesh also urged the international community to address the issue and the government outlined a plan to relocate the Rohingyas to an island at Hatia of Noakhali district, but it faced opposition from various quarters.



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