

Disputes need to be resolved through talks

PM tells Pak envoy about neighbours

UNB, Dhaka

Stating that Bangladesh believes in maintaining good relations with neighbouring countries, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said that while there may be disputes among neighbours, those need to be resolved through discussions.

"Problems may be there among neighbours but those should be solved through talks...friendship and cooperation should continue," she said.

The prime minister said this when the Pakistani High Commissioner in Dhaka, Rafiuzzaman Siddiqui, paid a courtesy call on her at her office in the morning.

After the meeting, the PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed reporters.

The prime minister said Bangladesh has solved land boundary and maritime disputes with India peacefully. "Indian parliament unanimously ratified the Land Boundary Bill," she said, adding that the peaceful resolution to the dispute has set

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina hands over an appointment letter to Basudeb, son of Jharna Rani who was killed in the militant attack at Sholakia of Kishoreganj last year. The photo was taken at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

Biman

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pay certain amount of money as compensation if we fail to land there on due date and time," he added.

He further said private hajj tour operators should become more serious to collect visas and tickets for pilgrims as the country's image is involved.

Mahbubur Rahman, public relations officer of civil aviation ministry, said Biman in 2016 was forced to cancel at least 23 dedicated hajj flights causing uncertainty over performing hajj by several thousand pilgrims.

He added irresponsibility and money making attitude of the hajj agencies are mainly responsible for the messy condition in hajj flights.

"Every year hajj agencies exercise the same practice to make their fortune at the cost of sufferings of the pilgrims," he observed.

Shakil Meraj said Biman has so far carried 11,036 pilgrims to Saudi Arabia as of yesterday morning.

As many as 127,198 pilgrims from Bangladesh are set to perform the annual ritual this year. Biman and Saudi Arabian Airlines would carry equal number of pilgrims to Saudi Arabia.

The maiden pre-hajj flight started on July 24. The last date of pre-hajj flight is August 26.

Hajj, the largest religious congregation of the Muslims, and Eid-ul-Azha are likely to be held in early September.

Innovative

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GHMC have pushed for the road to be converted from tar to concrete, and so has been completely dug up, forcing commuters to choose alternate routes which can also lead to a delay of up to two and a half hours.

Ramanjeet Singh, an IT professional, who rented a horse and rode it on the road to register his protest, says "Just about a couple of years ago, footpath and central median was laid with crores of money. Why this mindless act of more money down the drain is what we are asking." He adds "If the white topping was so important, there are so many roads full of potholes. Any one of them could have been taken up."

Singh was joined by nearly two dozen other techies for the protest on Friday morning.

The techies point out that ironically the minister and the top officers in GHMC had said no digging would be undertaken during the monsoon season. Then why an exception was made in this case, they ask.

"The road is one of busiest road in Cyberabad. They should have known it will take at least six months, why haven't they planned alternate routes," they ask.

The pressure to finish the job soon has had the contractor dig up the entire stretch whereas the road could have been dug up and done in parts, so as not to inconvenience commuters, the protestors say, adding, "Already alternate roads via Nanakramguda road and Nallagandla road are getting clogged. Traffic moves slowly and there is a real danger of life-threatening potholes."

"If the work continues for the next three to four months, it is going to be torture every single day, torture for all commuters. Can you imagine the wastage of crores in terms of fuel, the pollution, long hours of driving that will increase back and neck problems," another regular on this road points out.

Russia

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not for any time soon."

On Thursday, the US Senate overwhelmingly approved a bill to toughen sanctions on Russia for allegedly meddling in the 2016 US presidential election and for its annexation of Crimea in 2014.

Iran and North Korea are also targeted in the sanctions bill.

The law now goes to President Donald Trump who had made an improvement in ties with Russia a plank of his election campaign.

Moscow on Friday ordered the US to slash its number of diplomats in Russia to 455 and froze two embassy compounds -- a Moscow summer house and a storage facility in the city -- from August 1.

SC deplotes draft rules

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1861, but the rules prepared by the law ministry make district judges the "sole authority" to control assistant judges, the CJ said.

"In that case, you can as well dissolve the High Court," he told Attorney General Mahbubey Alam, who stood for submitting a petition to the SC seeking time for issuing a gazette notification on the rules.

The apex court decided to hold a meeting this week with judges, the law minister, the attorney general, experts and the government officials concerned to finalise the rules.

The court also fixed August 6 for passing further order on this issue.

During the proceedings, the chief justice sought to know from the attorney general the meaning of "competent authority," as the draft does not explain the term.

The AG did not respond.

The CJ then said that from the reading, it seemed that by "competent authority" the draft referred to the president. And by making the president the "competent authority", the draft in essence makes the law ministry the "competent authority."

The chief of any institution is the "competent authority" and in case of the judiciary, it is the Supreme Court, he asserted.

The SC verdict in Masdar Hossain case said the gazette on the rules would be effective from the date fixed by the apex court. But now the draft says the rules will come into force since the day of the gazette notification, Justice Sinha said.

Sixteen years into the SC verdict in the separation of judiciary case, the government has yet to formulate the

rules, and if things go on like this the gazette notification will not come in 1,600 years, he said.

Earlier, the law minister had fully agreed with the SC about formulating the rules, but the rules the ministry submitted is a complete departure from his previous position, the CJ added.

Terming the attorney general a "bridge" between the Supreme Court and the government, the chief justice said the attorney general would have to communicate with the government for holding a meeting to formulate a complete set of rules.

Law Minister Anisul Huq met the CJ at his office on Thursday and submitted the draft.

The minister then told reporters that the rules would be sent to the president for approval if the CJ gave

consent to those after scrutiny.

Contacted yesterday, Mahbubey Alam said he would inform the law ministry about the SC's decision to hold a meeting with judges, the law minister and the government officials concerned.

The meeting might take place on Wednesday, he added.

Meanwhile, the law minister told reporters in Jessore yesterday that the rules would be finalised upholding article 116 of the constitution.

"I am in discussion about this issue. When I submitted the draft rules, I had said that more discussions will take place, if necessary. There is nothing to say on this issue in such a way in the courtroom," he said.

At a function there earlier in the day, the minister said there was no conflict between the executive branch and the judiciary.

'It's murder, not suicide'

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Diaz committed suicide, said the first postmortem report, prepared by Chittagong Medical College and submitted to police on November 23.

But Diaz's family had rejected the first autopsy report and demanded a fresh autopsy, claiming that Diaz had been murdered.

"I did not get the [second] autopsy report yet, it will reach my office tomorrow evening," said Humayun, also senior assistant superintendent

of police of the Criminal Investigation Department in Chittagong, yesterday.

He added that he would be able to tell more after getting the report.

On December 6, a Chittagong court directed the district magistrate to exhume the body of Diaz for another autopsy. The order came following a petition filed by the CID seeking a fresh postmortem.

It had also ordered the DMC's Forensic Medicine Department head

to form a three-member committee to conduct the autopsy on Diaz's body.

On December 10, the body of Diaz was exhumed for a fresh autopsy following the court order.

Sohel Mahmud, head of DMC's Forensic Medicine Department, performed the autopsy and told the media on December 11 that some bruises were found on Diaz's body.

Their report would be submitted with their opinion after getting viscera and other reports, he added.

After that, Sohel and his team members visited Diaz's house.

Diaz's mother Jaheda Amin Chowdhury filed a murder case with a Chittagong court against 20 people four days after his death.

Diaz was also a former joint secretary of Chittagong University unit BCL, a pro-Awami League student body. When Diaz's body was found hanging in his house near Gate-2 of the university, his family members were not at home.

Water tariff hike once again

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"A utility service provider can't hike price unilaterally. There must be a public hearing before taking decisions on water pricing."

Referring to yesterday's High Court verdict halting second-time gas price hike in a year, Ghulam said there should be a water regulatory commission to stop "arbitrary" hike in water price.

"There is an energy regulatory commission for holding public hearings for power price adjustments but nothing like this for water."

Former Anti-Corruption Commission chairman, Ghulam emphasised the need for making Dhaka Wasa more accountable to the people.

Everybody didn't get a pay hike, he said, adding that the most affected

would be the poor living in the capital.

Dhaka Wasa board member AKMA Hamid told The Daily Star that the board had decided to increase the price to cope with the yearly 7 percent inflation.

Even after this hike, the water price is far below Wasa's cost of production - Tk 16-17 per unit, said Dhaka Wasa Managing Director Taqsem A Khan.

Dhaka Wasa's water production cost is one of the lowest in the world. Yet, the government has to provide subsidy as "we're selling water at a much lower rate than the production cost," Taqsem said.

The price of supplied water in Colombo is Tk 12 per unit while it ranges between Tk 14 and Tk 18 per unit in big cities across India.

The Wasa MD, however, welcomed the suggestion that a water regulatory

commission should be formed and public hearings be held on water pricing.

"Law doesn't allow us [Wasa] to go for a price hike of more than 5 percent at once. So, we've to depend on the government to decide if further hike is needed."

Last November, the government responded to a long-pending plea by the Wasa for a significant rise in the water prices and so the prices went up by 17 and 13 percent in one go for domestic and commercial supplies.

The price hike this time comes at a time when many users living in different city neighborhoods complain of poor quality of piped water.

Residents said that at times they got stinky water due to faulty supply lines.

A city resident said the quality of

supply water sometimes fell so much that it prompted his family to boil water before pouring it into water purifier to get drinking water.

Though the "system loss" in Wasa's water supply has dropped in recent years, 20 percent water is still being wasted. It was as high as 36 percent a decade ago.

Wasa officials said they were setting up new pipelines replacing old ones. The system loss will come down to seven or eight percent soon.

Its MD Taqsem said the authority had a plan to use surface water more than groundwater.

Established in 1963 as an independent organisation with a mandate to ensure water supply and sewage disposal in Dhaka, Wasa brought the water supply service of Narayanganj under its purview in 1990.

Breaking

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in inter-district judo championships. "I try to practice every day," she says. "I have a dream to achieve a medal on the international stage and am preparing for that. I enjoy my training. I seek to perfect techniques."

The classes held at the town's stadium attract girls of all ages and levels. Anika Anjum is a twelfth-grader. Sisters Badhan Moni Khatun and Naima Khatun study in classes six and four respectively. The girls in white uniform wear the traditional belts in yellow, blue, black and white that signify the level of skill attained.

Anika comes from a single-parent family. She lives with her mother and 15-year-old brother Hridoy, a motorcycle garage mechanic and the sole breadwinner for the family. Anika's father divorced her mother when Anika was a young child. "On my brother's income we can barely afford schooling and nutritious food," she says, "let alone new clothes." Yet despite her humble background, karate has given her self-confidence; she feels safer on the streets. Karate is a sport that's breaking social barriers.

"The practice room in the stadium gives the girls a place to breathe," says judo, karate and boxing academy coach Bablu Zaman, who is employed as a record assistant at the Chapainawabganj Judge Court. "Here they can take time out from their day-to-day worries and pursue sports that will make them confident, healthy and strong."

Bablu is not only their coach but also a mentor and the visionary behind the martial arts and boxing academy. He learnt karate and judo from 1984 in Rajshahi before introducing the classes which currently engage twelve additional trainers, in Chapainawabganj. Over the past thirty-one years he has also been instrumental in convincing parents to allow their daughters to participate.

"It's been an uphill battle," Bablu says candidly. "Many parents and other relatives did not think sport was appropriate for girls in general. The girls themselves felt under pressure and were hesitant at first. But now the scenario is changing and many girls have joined our classes."

Over the years Bablu's students which currently include about a hundred boys in addition to the girls, have achieved much. Over fifty of them have won medals at national and international competitions. Thirty-six of his students, including his two daughters, have gained employment in the Bangladesh defence forces.

"Girls face many obstacles in their lives, including poverty, social and cultural barriers," says Toufiqueul Islam, the general secretary of the district sport association. "But because of karate, our girls are breaking those barriers. They have the chance to live their dreams."

Unesco decisions, govt version differ

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Unesco's decision was contrary to what Bangladesh's delegation had claimed after returning from the session held in Poland.

On July 9, briefing newsmen about the outcome of the session, Prime Minister's Energy Affairs Adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury said the government would continue building the Rampal power plant and do an SEA alongside as per Unesco's request.

But in reality, the UN organisation has given Bangladesh until December 2018 to implement recommendations made by a UN monitoring mission for protecting the Sundarbans before it could start building the power plant.

The government has been allowed time until December 1 next year to report on the conservation of the world's largest mangrove forest to the WHC. And the UN organisation would examine the conservation situation at the 43rd session of the World Heritage Committee in 2019.

On July 6, when the 41st session was in progress, a Bangladesh foreign ministry release said the World Heritage Committee of Unesco had withdrawn its objection to the setting up of the plant at its current site near the Sundarbans.

In his press brief, Tawfiq-e-Elahi had said the government would do necessary dredging to ensure adequate water flow into the Sundarbans.

The Unesco yesterday said it had requested Bangladesh to put in place a management system for shipping to minimise negative impacts, including from associated activities such as dredging. It reiterated its request to Bangladesh to undertake the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for any future dredging of the Pashur river.

It welcomed Bangladesh's move of not approving the Orion power plant and phase-II of the Rampal power plant in the Sundarbans area.

It, however, noted with concern that sea level rise, salt intrusion and reductions in fresh water flows were posing a threat to the Sundarbans' ecosystem and that the area was particularly vulnerable to impacts from these threats.

It emphasised on the importance of trans-boundary cooperation between Bangladesh and India in preservation of the Sundarbans and urged Bangladesh to fully implement the recommendations made by a Unesco mission last year in relation to ensuring adequate freshwater inflows to the mangrove forest.

Welcoming the development of a draft "National Oil Spill and Chemical Contingency Plan" (NOSCP), the Unesco requested Bangladesh to ensure adequate provision for funding and human resources for the implementation of the plan once it was adopted, and to provide further information and data on the monitoring of long-term impacts from recent ship-

ping incidents involving spills of hazardous materials in proximity to the Sundarbans.

The Unesco website also mentioned that the UN body had taken note of the Unesco mission's concerns about the likely environmental impacts of the Rampal coal-fired power plant on the Sundarbans arising from air and water pollution, a substantial increase in shipping and dredging, and additional removal of freshwater from an already increasingly saline environment.

It requested Bangladesh to ensure that these impacts were comprehensively assessed as part of the SEA and adequate technological measures were put in place to mitigate these impacts.

Bharat Heavy Electricals Ltd (BHEL)

was awarded the contract to construct the 1,320MW Maitree Super Thermal Power Plant in Bagerhat's Rampal near the Sundarbans, for an estimated cost of \$1.68 billion.

A joint-venture company styled Bangladesh-India Friendship Power Company Ltd (BIFPCL) had been formed to implement the project.

The Rampal project is 14km from the Sundarbans. There has been growing concerns at home and abroad over the power plant's impact on its ecology.

India is providing 80 percent of the cost as loan, repayable over a period of 30 years, at one percent interest. Bangladesh has offered the land.

The Sundarbans was included in the World Heritage Site list in 1997.