

FOURTH JCC MEETING

# Dhaka proposes more connectivity

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka proposed India new regional connectivity initiatives at the fourth meeting of India-Bangladesh Joint Consultative Commission (ICC) yesterday.

After the meeting, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, who co-chaired the meeting with India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, in a press statement said India agreed to "positively consider" the proposals.

He said the two countries were cooperating to enhance connectivity through road, rail and waterways. "We proposed some new regional connectivity initiatives," he said.

Dhaka-Chennai-Colombo air connectivity, Chittagong-Kolkata-Colombo shipping connectivity, Panchgarh-Shiliguri rail link, internet connectivity with Bhutan through

Indian territory, and Trade route connecting Nakugaon Land Port (Bangladesh) to Gaylephung (Bhutan) via Dalu (India) were some of them.

Mahmood said during the meeting they also agreed that BBIN Motor Vehicle Agreement would be implemented between Bangladesh, India and Nepal [BIN] through exchange of letters, keeping the provision for Bhutan to join in later.

The Bhutanese parliament did not approve the agreement that apparently stalled the initiative.

Mahmood said they agreed that MoU for trilateral hydropower cooperation among Bangladesh, India and Bhutan would be signed soon. "India also agreed to facilitate import of electricity by Bangladesh from hydro projects in Nepal," he said.

In addition to the current import

SEE PAGE 13 COL 3

## Myanmar must take

FROM PAGE 1

international community to contribute to the social and economic development of the Rakhine State.

The Indian minister lauded Bangladesh's stance and also the PM for showing humanitarian attitude to the forcibly displaced people of Myanmar.

Referring to Indian PM Narendra Modi's recent visit to Myanmar, she said Modi told Aung San Suu Kyi that she has a very bright international image and why she should destroy it, reports UNB.

Ihsanul said Hasina told Swaraj that Bangladesh has given shelter to Rohingya on humanitarian grounds, and its home minister would visit Myanmar soon.

Swaraj said India attaches "utmost importance" to its relations with Bangladesh.

"Our relations are based on fraternal ties and are reflective of an all-encompassing partnership based on sovereignty, equality, trust and understanding that goes far beyond a strategic partnership."

She also expressed satisfaction over the current state of Indo-Bangla relations.

At the meeting, Swaraj presented Hasina with memorabilia of the 1971 Liberation War to be displayed at the Liberation War Museum.

The memorabilia include military equipment used by the joint forces of India and Bangladesh during the Liberation War as well as a large number of artefacts and documents, including historical photographs and archival audio and video.

At the Bangladesh National Museum's request, India has gifted one MI-4 helicopter, two PT-6 tanks and 25 types of arms.

New Delhi also presented Dhaka with colour copies of the original surrender certificate, original refugee relief postal stamps, refugee relief postal stationeries and original leaflets airdropped in Bangladesh.

Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, PM's International Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Syed Muazzem Ali, and PM's Principal Secretary Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury were present at the meeting from the Bangladesh side.

Indian Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, Indian High Commissioner in Dhaka Harsh Vardhan Shringla and Joint Secretary (Bangladesh-Myanmar Division) Sripriya Ranganathan were present from the Indian side.

JOINT PRESS CONFERENCE

Earlier in the afternoon, Swaraj and her Bangladesh counterpart Mahmood Ali joined the fourth meeting of the JCC at Sonargaon Hotel.

At a joint press conference after the meeting, Swaraj said India believes the solution to the Rakhine crisis lies in the return of the displaced people to their homes in Myanmar.

"Normalcy will only be restored with the return of the displaced persons to Rakhine State," she said.

Voicing concern over the situation in Myanmar, Swaraj said, "India is deeply concerned at the spate of violence in Rakhine State of Myanmar. We have urged that the situation be handled with restraint, keeping in mind the welfare of the population."

"We have also supported the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Kofi Annan-led Special Advisory Commission report."

The Indian minister's statement came as Mahmood urged New Delhi to put pressure on Myanmar to find a peaceful solution to the Rakhine crisis.

Though Swaraj didn't use the word "Rohingya", she mentioned that lakhs of displaced people have

fled Rakhine and taken shelter in Cox's Bazar.

Swaraj's visit comes at a time when Bangladesh is struggling to deal with a large influx of Rohingyas since August 25.

The number of newly arrived Myanmar nationals reached 600,000 yesterday. Apart from them, more than 400,000 Rohingyas have been living in Bangladesh for decades.

Spelling out India's view on a permanent solution to the crisis, Swaraj said, "The only long-term solution to the situation in Rakhine State is rapid socio-economic and infrastructure development that would have a positive impact on all the communities living in the State."

"India, for its part, has committed to provide financial and technical assistance for identified projects to be undertaken in Rakhine State in conjunction with the local authorities."

In his statement, Mahmood thanked India for the support, and said Bangladesh is "happy to be reassured that India would continue to support the humanitarian assistance."

"India is our most important, trusted and friendly neighbour," he said, adding that the relation is now at a "historic new height".

Later in the day, Leader of the Opposition Raushan Ershad and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia met Swaraj separately at her Sonargaon Hotel suite.

Swaraj, who led a seven-member delegation to Bangladesh, departs Dhaka today after attending programmes at the Indian High Commission where she would inaugurate the new Chancery Complex at 9:30am.

She would also launch 15 development projects in Bangladesh via video conference and deliver a speech. Mahmood would also be present there.

## Sushma praises JP's role in parliament

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Visiting Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj yesterday praised opposition Jatiya Party for its "active and constructive" role in the present parliament.

Sushma expressed the opinion when a seven-member JP delegation, led by Opposition Leader Raushan Ershad, called on her at a city hotel.

"The Indian minister hailed the present opposition party for its active participation in parliament," said JP presidium member SM Faysal Chisti, who was present at the meeting.

Quoting Sushma, Faysal said during the 40-minute meeting, she praised Raushan for her active and regular participation in parliamentary activities.

"She [Sushma] mentioned that the opposition leader [BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia] in previous ninth parliament attended only nine sittings," Faysal claimed.

After the meeting, Raushan said the Indian minister assured them that India would fully cooperate with Bangladesh for a permanent solution to the Rohingya crisis.

"We requested her to put pressure on Myanmar to take back the Rohingyas to their country. She [Sushma] told us that India supports Bangladesh's position that Myanmar must take back its nationals," added Raushan.

Asked, Raushan said no discussion was held on the Bangladesh's internal political issues or on the next general elections. "Election is far away. We didn't have any discussion on this issue," she told reporters.

PHOTO ON PAGE 5



Rokiya, a Rohingya woman, holds her 10-month-old malnourished son, as a nurse checks him at the Action Against Hunger centre in Kutupalong refugee camp in Cox's Bazar yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## No real progress yet

FROM PAGE 1

a statement in mid-September, expressing concern over "excessive violence" by Myanmar security forces in Rakhine State, home to the majority of Rohingyas.

At the end of September, the UNSC discussed the crisis in an open meeting, but failed to take any decision due to China and Russia's opposition. That was all.

No further action was seen in the last three weeks while the atrocities continued unabated. UN Chief Antonio Guterres and other top UN officials' repeated calls for suspension of military action against the Rohingyas fell flat as UNSC did nothing.

Unless China and Russia--two permanent members of the UNSC with veto power--change their minds and refrain from supporting Myanmar, it is almost impossible for the council to do something to stop the exodus and pave the way for their voluntary return to their homeland.

Amid this situation, a ministerial-level conference on the crisis will be held in Geneva today to collect funds for humanitarian aid.

## WB mission assessing need for aid

FROM PAGE 1

and Tekabe Belay, programme leader of its Human Development, has arrived in Dhaka on Saturday on a 14-day visit to do the evaluation.

The team went to Cox's Bazar, where some 1 million Rohingya people are sheltered, on a four-day visit yesterday.

After returning to Dhaka, the team will sit with officials from relief and disaster management, education, home and health ministries as well as local government engineering department.

Among others, they will hold talks with Abul Kalam Azad, principal coordinator for SDGs at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), and Kazi Shofiqul Azam, secretary of the Economic Relations Division.

On the basis of the discussions, the WB will prepare a draft aid memoire, an official of the finance ministry said.

If the negotiations are fruitful, Bangladesh will receive around \$300 million from the newly created WB refugee window fund, which allocated \$600 million for the South Asia region, the official added.

After Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's approval on October 15,

The conference, co-hosted by the European Union and the government of Kuwait, and co-organised by three UN agencies--UNHCR, IOM and OCHA, is being held to raise \$434 million. But commitments so far have been made only of \$116 million.

The UN agencies have plans to provide humanitarian aid till next February.

Humanitarian aid alone is not a solution to the crisis. It will help Rohingyas survive the next six months. What happens after February is still uncertain. But that Bangladesh will have to bear the brunt in the coming days is certain.

Everybody knows the root causes of this crisis are in Myanmar. But the lack of collective effort, particularly the failure of the UNSC to take decisive action, keeps allowing Myanmar to continue its ethnic cleansing before the eyes of world leaders, who have repeatedly promised in the past to take action on genocide.

After failing to stop genocides in Rwanda and Bosnia in the 1990s, the UN renewed its commitments and developed new mechanisms, including an office of the UN special advisor

on prevention of genocides.

World leaders at the United Nations World Summit in 2005 agreed that the international community has a responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other means to protect populations from genocide and crimes against humanity.

The leaders also promised to be prepared to take collective action in accordance with the UN charter when a state manifestly fails to protect its population.

That the efforts bore no fruit was exposed by the UN and international communities' failure to protect Rohingyas. They are being treated by the Myanmar military in the same way as the Hutus treated the Tutsis like insects during the Rwanda genocide.

For their failure in Rwanda, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan, both chiefs of the UN, and several world leaders apologised a few years after the genocide.

"The United Nations and its member states failed Rwanda and its people during the 100-day genocide and expressed 'deep remorse' that more wasn't done to stop it," Annan said in a

## Radical Buddhists urge Myanmar not to take back Rohingyas

Only a few hundred show up for demo in Sittwe

AP, Sittwe

Hundreds of hard-line Buddhists protested yesterday to urge Myanmar's government not to repatriate the nearly 600,000 minority Rohingyas who have fled to Bangladesh since late August to escape violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state.

The protest took place in Sittwe, the state capital, where many Rohingyas lived before an outbreak of inter-communal violence in 2012 forced them to flee their homes.

Aung Htay, a protest organizer, said any citizens would be welcome in the state. "But if these people don't have the right to be citizens ... the government's plan for a conflict-free zone will never be implemented," he said.

Myanmar doesn't recognise Rohingya

SEE PAGE 13 COL 3

statement in 1999.

On a 1998 state visit to Rwanda, former US president Bill Clinton apologised for inaction to prevent the genocide in 1994.

"It may seem strange to you here, especially the many of you who lost members of your family, but all over the world there were people like me sitting in offices, day after day after day, who did not fully appreciate the depth and speed with which you were being engulfed by this unimaginable terror," Clinton said.

Annan's successor Ban Ki-moon in 2014 said, "The UN is still ashamed over its failure to prevent the 1994 genocide in Rwanda."

With the memories of Rwanda and Bosnia still there, the genocide should not have taken place in Myanmar. The world leaders should have taken prompt action to stop Myanmar military.

But the harrowing tales of Rohingyas show how the world leaders failed to deliver on their promises.

Will they apologise in future for their failure? It would seem like they prefer apologising or saying sorry over taking actions.

Since violence broke out in Myanmar on August 25, at least 6,00,000 Rohingya people, according to the UN -- about 60 percent of them children -- have crossed into Bangladesh to join nearly 400,000 of their fellow countrymen who fled violence in Myanmar in phases over the years.

After a meeting with Muhith at the WB headquarters in Washington on October 12, the global lender in a statement said it was ready to move with a programme of support for Bangladesh government, host communities, and the Rohingya refugees.

After the meeting, the finance minister told reporters that Bangladesh was going to seek assistance formally from the Bank for about 10 lakh forcibly displaced Rohingyas.

"We have not specified any amount but have appealed for help and will get the maximum they can spare," he said, adding that 50 percent of the amount would likely be in grant.

Muhith said Bangladesh needed about \$2 billion for the Rohingya refugees but only \$600 million was allocated for the region from the fund.

## No classical music festival this year

FROM PAGE 1

When it was known that the Pope was arriving on November 30 and his main programme would not be held at the Army Stadium, Bengal Foundation reapplied for the venue on September 9 but no progress was made in this regard.

It takes about eight months to plan and prepare for the festival and therefore it was not possible to shift the dates, Bengal Foundation Chairman Abul Khair informed, adding that another venue was not an option because of the stature of the festival and the security requirements of the performing artistes and the large number of audience members. "As much as it hurts us, we have to cancel this year's festival. I hope the audience will forgive me," said a distraught Abul Khair.

The news was met with shock and disbelief among music enthusiasts, on social media and in the cultural fraternity as well. "There are many people like me who will be disheartened at the news. The festival is a milestone cultural event," eminent painter and

classical music aficionado Rafiqun Nabi told The Daily Star.

However, Minister of Cultural Affairs Asaduzzaman Noor did not give up hope. "I am still optimistic that with the direct initiative of the Honourable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, the festival may be rescheduled," he told The Daily Star.

An illustrious lineup of artistes were scheduled to perform at this year's festival, including Pt. Jasraj (vocals), Pt. Vishwa Mohan Bhatt (Mohan Vena), first South Indian Grammy winner Vidwan Vikku Vinayakram (Carnatic percussion), a Western Classical Symphonic Orchestra (to perform with violin maestro Pt. L Subramaniam) for the first time, along with festival regulars Pt. Ajoy Chakravarty (vocals), Ustad Rashid Khan (vocals), Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia (flute), Pt. Ullhas Kashalkar (vocals), Ustad Shahid Parvez Khan (sitar), Kaushiki Chakravarty (vocal), Purbayan Chatterjee (sitar) and Pt. Tejendra Narayan Majumdar (sarod).

Initiated in 2012, with assistance from Kolkata's ITC Sangeet Research

Academy the first year, the Bengal Classical Music Festival became a marquee event of Bangladesh's cultural calendar. The four-nightlong festival featured the world's leading exponents of Hindustani and Carnatic Classical Music in the first two years, with attendance numbers reaching nearly 100,000 in the second year. Since 2014, the festival was extended to five nights, and audience numbers swelled to 1,50,000. That year the Bengal Parampara Sangeetalay also began its journey with the aim of producing future classical musicians and singers, under the tutelage of noted classical gurus. In 2016, the attendance rose to nearly 200,000.

Artists like Vidushi Girija Devi, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Ustad Zakir Hussain, Birju Maharaj, Balamurali Krishna, Kishori A Monkar, Ustad Rashid Khan, Pt Ajoy Chakravarty, Pt Hariprasad Chaurasia, Pt Shiv Kumar Sharma, Ustad Ali Ahmed Hussein, Parveen Sultana, Pt Swapan Chaudhury, Pt Anindo Chatterjee, Vidushi Prabha Atre, Kaushiki Chakravarty, Vidushi Alarmel Valli,

Bombay Jayashree, Aruna Sairam, Guru Karikudi Mani and countless other gems of Classical Music have graced the stage of this prestigious festival, along with an increasing number of group and solo performances by Bangladeshi artistes. The first edition featured 10 Bangladeshi performers, which by 2016 rose to 165.

The festival has garnered praise from all quarters for its fantastic event management (by Blues Communications) including security, amenities and convenience of shuttle bus services. From ministers, diplomats and social elites to the middle class and from teenagers to the elderly, the festival has been attended by people of all ages and classes with great festivity and fervor.

Aside from the festival, Bengal Foundation has dedicatedly held other supporting events including workshops and programmes to give momentum to the practice of classical music in the country. The organisation also held a 10-day Bengal Sangskriti Utsah in Sylhet, displaying all aspects of Bangla culture.