

NEW INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Hasina to name location soon

Says parliamentary body chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The new international airport is likely to be on the other side of the Padma, and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is going to announce the location very soon, Faruk Khan, chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on civil aviation ministry, said yesterday.

In the meeting, the committee expressed resentment over the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh's (Caab) failure to complete the construction work of the headquarters within the stipulated time.

The parliamentary watchdog asked the Caab chairman to investigate and submit a report before the Jatiya Sangsad committee over the matter.

On the construction of the new Bangabandhu International Airport, PM Hasina on February 1 told parliament that a feasibility study on construction of the airport on the other side of the Padma river will begin soon.

On September 22, last year, Caab signed a Tk 120 crore deal with a Japanese firm to conduct feasibility studies, select a suitable site and make

a master plan for the airport to meet the growing air traffic.

Under the agreement, Nippon Koei, founded in 1946, will finish its job in one and a half years.

The new airport will replace the capital's Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport from being the aerodrome hub.

Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport was constructed in the 60s for domestic use with just one runway and an annual capacity to deal with 8 million passengers.

The Caab chief yesterday told the committee that it was not possible to expand the airport due to residential areas nearby and that the maximum capacity of the airport would be utilised between 2028 and 2035.

According to Caab, the country has three international and 12 domestic airports. At least 38 airlines use Bangladeshi airports.

The infrastructural facilities of the country's existing airports are now not enough to meet the growing air traffic, the Caab chief informed the JS body

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Scenic Jaflong

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issue the gazette also asked to stop the use of such excavators, locally known as "boma machines", and other earth-moving equipment in the area.

The court had directed the government to remove all such machines to protect Jaflong's eco-system, biodiversity, and the livelihoods of people living along the rivers.

General Secretary Abdul Karim Kim of Bangladesh Paribesh Andolon, Sylhet chapter, said the ECA also covers the entire Khasipurji area up to the Pyain river, including 500 metres on both sides of the river.

"But the stone extraction, crushing, and dumping are going on unabated," he said.

During a visit, The Daily Star correspondent saw that the picturesque hills of the area were being systematically devoured by excavators for stone extraction on a large scale. The noise made by the machines could be heard from a long distance away.

The indiscriminate stone lifting was hurting the adjacent Jafflong Tea Company Ltd. Authorities of the estate have requested the local administration to take necessary steps to protect their estate from the destructive activities, said sources in the company.

Chief Executive Abdul Hye Al-Hadi of Save the Heritage and Environment said more than 100 such stone extracting machines were being used by the so-called stone traders, allegedly in collusion with the local administration, ruling party men, and even journalists.

Amid the indifference of the authorities concerned, stone lifters recently set up some crushers on the riverside hills of Noya Bosti and Kando Bosti, all inside the ECA.

Stones collected by the "boma machines" are being crushed there and then sent to different parts of the coun-

try for use in construction.

Villagers of Noya Bosti and Kando Bosti, tired of the noise and seeing the destruction of their neighbourhoods before their eyes, submitted a petition to the Sylhet deputy commissioner on August 31 asking for steps.

"But we are helpless," said Fokrul Islam, a signatory of the petition. "There is no sign of improvement of the situation although we have appealed repeatedly to the authorities concerned."

According to the villagers, the stone lifters had the blessings of influential people and ruling party leaders. Consequently, goons were threatening the locals for lodging complaints against the stone lifters.

Local UP member Ataur Rahman Atai claimed that he was put behind bars under a false case because he protested the illegal stone extraction.

Asked about the villagers' petition, Deputy Commissioner Rahat Anwar of Sylhet said the authorities were aware of the illegal activity. "Sometimes we conduct drives against the boma machines. We call upon the locals to come forward and help the administration in preventing such illegal acts," he said.

Sylhet Coordinator of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela) Shaheda Begam told The Daily Star that years had gone by since the High Court directive and the gazette notification but the ECA had not been implemented properly.

Gowainghat upazila AL unit President Mohammad Ibrahim said there was no denying that illegal stone extraction was going on in Jaflong. The party condemns such activities, he said, adding that local ruling party activists in Jaflong could be involved in such acts and that he would take punitive actions if specific allegations were brought against a party man.



Two owners of Apan Jewellers being taken to jail after they surrendered before a Dhaka court yesterday in two money laundering cases filed against them with Gulshan Police Station.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Three owners surrender

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Dhaka after the expiry of their bail period on September 21.

Metropolitan magistrates -- Nurunnahar Yasmin, Debrata Biswas and Mahmudul Hassan -- sent Dildar to jail after he appeared before the courts and sought bail in three cases.

Another Metropolitan Magistrate Md Ahsan Habib sent Gulzar and Azad to jail in two cases.

Dildar is the father of Banani rape case accused Shafat Ahmed. The trial of the case against Shafat and four others is being dealt with another Dhaka court.

Court sources said the bail of Dildar, Gulzar and Azad was cancelled and they were sent to jail as they did not appear before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court of

Dhaka after the expiry of their bail period on September 21.

The three secured bail from the High Court for four weeks on August 22.

On Monday, two Dhaka courts issued arrest warrants for them in the three money laundering cases.

On August 12, Customs Intelligence filed five cases against the three Apan Jewellers' owners under the Money Laundering Prevention Act.

According to the statements of the cases, the accused imported around 15 maunds of gold and diamonds by "dodging tax".

Dildar has stood accused in three cases, while Gulzar and Azad have been accused in two cases.



This photo taken on Sunday shows Myanmar refugee Halima with her eight-month-old son Hares as he is treated at a Red Cross field hospital in Cox's Bazar. The baby was suffering from severe pneumonia and high fever at a squalid camp after his family fled violence in Myanmar. By the time the family rushed him to the newly established 60-bed hospital, the tiny boy was barely breathing as infection almost crippled his lungs. "Had he come even an hour later, he would have no chance to survive," said Peter Meyer, team leader of the tent hospital built over several acres of rubber garden.

PHOTO: AFP

After India, it's China's turn

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Rohingya's, Sushma has maintained that India is "deeply concerned at the spate of violence in Rakhine State" and normalcy will only be restored with the return of the displaced persons to Rakhine state.

Her mentioning that "lakhs of displaced persons who have fled from Rakhine State of Myanmar" also makes it obvious under which situation such a large number of people could flee their own country. After all, 1971 is still vivid in Indian memory.

Sushma's words should go a long way to bolster the world's efforts to stop the violence against the Rohingyas and to help return of the displaced people to their homeland.

For Bangladesh it was also a diplomatic breakthrough.

However, a difficult task still

remains. India, one of the two biggest neighbours of Myanmar, can now exert a lot of influence on Myanmar in stopping the horror being unleashed on the most persecuted people of modern times, the Rohingyas. Myanmar has created such a precarious situation that it may affect the whole South Asian and Southeast Asian region if the incidents trigger terrorism. India is rightly alarmed at the prospect and should do its best to mobilise world powers and remedy the situation.

On this point, Sushma has rightly pointed out that the only long term solution to the situation is rapid socio-economic development that would have a "positive impact on all the communities living in the State". India has taken the first step and now it should move to permanently resolve the issue.

Sushma showed her mettle when she

put a clever spin to her opening remark that India-Bangladesh relation goes "far beyond a strategic partnership".

It was the Chinese President Xi Jinping, who during his visit last year to Dhaka, used the term of endearment for Bangladesh as a "strategic partner". But that partnership came to nada when the Rohingya crisis unfolded. China, instead of honouring that "strategic partnership", sided with Myanmar. Not only did it not raise any voice against the violence against the Rohingyas, it placed two vetoes at the UN Security Council on a Myanmar resolution. Because of its opposition in September, the Security Council failed to take any resolution on Myanmar. And then this week, China spoke out against any foreign interference in Myanmar.

China, whose investment in Myanmar reached \$18.53 billion up to

January 2017 and considers Myanmar an important tool in its One Belt, One Road initiative, ignored the fact that its "strategic partner" is suffering because of the ethnic cleansing in Myanmar.

But China should not forget the strategic importance of Bangladesh. China and Bangladesh signed three dozen deals worth around \$25 billion for infrastructure development during Xi's visit, not to mention Bangladesh's importance in the implementation of One Belt, One Road project.

A peaceful region is needed for such an ambitious scheme to go through. China, that champions many globally crucial areas including climate change, should not ignore the ongoing humanitarian crisis and should come forward like India to resolve the situation.

US mulls sanctions on Myanmar

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"It is imperative that any individuals or entities responsible for atrocities, including non-state actors and vigilantes, be held accountable," she noted in a press statement on Monday.

More than 600,000 displaced Rohingyas have fled their homes in Rakhine and taken refuge in Bangladesh since the crisis began on August 25.

On October 16, the European Union suspended invitations to the commander-in-chief of the Myanmar armed forces and its other senior military officers in the light of the disproportionate use of force.

The EU also said it would review all practical defence cooperation, and may consider more steps if the situation in Rakhine doesn't improve.

According to an AP report, US officials are preparing a recommendation for Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to declare that "ethnic cleansing" is occurring against Rohingyas in Myanmar. That assessment would raise pressure on the Trump administration and US lawmakers to consider new sanctions on a country that had been lauded for its democratic transition.

The US government began a programme of sanctions against Myanmar in May 1997 when the country was run by a military junta. Following a transition toward democracy, President Barack Obama ended the programme last year. The EU lifted sanctions against Myanmar in 2013, with the exception of an arms embargo.

Heather Nauert said, "We find all units and officers involved in operations in northern Rakhine State to be ineligible to receive or participate in any US assistance programs."

The US has also rescinded all invitations to senior members of Myanmar's security forces to US-sponsored events.

She mentioned that the US was consulting with its allies and partners about accountability options at the UN, the UN Human Rights Council, and other appropriate venues, and was also exploring "accountability mechanisms available under US law".

"We are working with international partners to urge that Burma enables unhindered access to relevant areas for the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission, international humanitarian organisations, and the media."

The US will continue to support Myanmar's transition to democracy, as well as efforts to resolve the current crisis in Rakhine State, she said in the statement, a sign that the US may reimpose sanctions on Myanmar.

"However, the Myanmar government, including its armed forces, must take immediate action to ensure peace

and security; implement commitments to ensure humanitarian access to communities in desperate need; facilitate the safe and voluntary return of those who have fled or been displaced in Rakhine State," Nauert said.

The US spokesperson called for addressing the root causes of systematic discrimination against the Rohingyas by implementing the recommendations of Kofi Annan Commission.

RECOMMENDATION FOR US SECRETARY OF STATE

Rex Tillerson could receive as early as this week the recommendation for declaring that "ethnic cleansing" is occurring against Rohingyas, officials familiar with the process told AP.

He will then decide whether to adopt the advice of his agency's policy experts and lawyers.

A declaration of "ethnic cleansing" by the top US diplomat would mark a reversal of fortune in American relations with Myanmar whose civilian government has been under the leadership of Nobel Peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi for more than a year.

But Suu Kyi and her government allies have little control over Myanmar's still powerful military, which is blamed for the brutal crackdown on Rohingyas.

The recommendation is being prepared as US lawmakers urge fresh sanctions on Myanmar's military and are calling on the Trump administration to sever already restricted military ties.

Calls for a US determination of "ethnic cleansing" have intensified, as the UN and leading Western governments have used the term. Six weeks ago, UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Husseini said it "seems a textbook example of ethnic cleansing."

Tillerson, who last week said perpetrators would be held accountable for atrocities, has referred to the violence as "characterised by many as ethnic cleansing."

Nikki Haley, US ambassador to the UN, told the Security Council last month that it was "a brutal, sustained campaign to cleanse the country of an ethnic minority."

US lawmakers have pushed the administration to use the term without qualification.

Earlier this month, Patrick Murphy, a senior US diplomat for Southeast Asia, described it as a "human tragedy".

More than 40 House members wrote to Tillerson last week to seek "significant actions to stop the ethnic cleansing" of the Rohingyas.

HEARING AT SENATE COMMITTEE

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee yesterday held a hearing on US policy toward Myanmar.

At the hearing, senior senators demanded a rethink of US policy toward Myanmar in response to what they called a systematic military campaign to force Rohingyas out of the country.

Ben Cardin, the top-ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, characterised the crackdown as "genocide" and said the US should seek accountability for the perpetrators.

Bob Corker, the Republican committee chair, questioned whether the Obama administration had rolled back sanctions too quickly in response to Myanmar's shift toward democracy.

DHAHA SEEKS GLOBAL ACTION

Bangladesh has renewed its call to the UN for playing a stronger role in ensuring the safe return of all Rohingyas to their homeland from Bangladesh.

There's no alternative to the return of around 1 million forcibly displaced people from Myanmar to their homeland with dignity and safety. The international community and the UN need to play a stronger role in finding a solution to the problem, Dipu Moni, chairperson of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, said at the UN headquarters in New York on Monday.

Dipu Moni, also former foreign minister, pointed out that the international community can no more dishearten these Rohingya people, according to a press release of the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh to the UN.

She held meetings with UN Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs Jeffrey David Feltman, Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten and Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar Yanghee Lee.

AID FROM UK, SWITZERLAND

The UK and Switzerland have pledged an additional \$24 million as humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh.

At the pledging conference in Geneva on Monday, the UK announced that it would provide further £12 million (\$15.78 million) for them.

With this, the UK has committed £47 million (\$63 million) since the end of August, said a press release of the British High Commission.

Switzerland has decided to increase its financial contribution to \$8.8 million. Earlier, it had provided \$1 million as emergency assistance for the refugees.