

ICT can drive away graft

FROM PAGE 1
Sheikh Abdul Wahid, managing director of LEADS Corporation Ltd; Raisul Kabir, managing director of Brain Station 23 Ltd; Zia Ashraf, CEO of Chaldal.com; Adnan Imtiaz Halim, CEO of Sheba.xyz; Hussain M Elius, CEO of Pathao; M Rezaul Hassan and A Towhid received the awards from the finance minister.

Muhith was flanked by State Minister for ICT Zunaid Ahmed Palak, Brac Bank Managing Director and CEO Selim RF Hussain, and BASIS President Mustafa Jabbar.

Bangladesh has experienced considerable growth in information technology in recent years and the ICT landscape now includes numerous firms -- both old and new -- working tirelessly to deliver services to their customers.

The Daily Star introduced the awards in 2016 to propagate the development in the sector and recognise the front-runners who can serve as benchmarks for others.

The awards also aim to recognise the excellent works in the ICT sector, encourage the ICT community to strengthen the ICT ecosystem, create an environment that sustains entrepreneurial spirit, and support the young ICT entrepreneurs to utilise their potentials.

Yesterday's programme began with the rendering of songs of Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra by five emerging singers, as the ceremony was held in the month of victory.

In his speech, the finance minister thanked The Daily Star and the BASIS for initiating the awards.

He also gave an example of a college in Sylhet which saw its collection of fees and other charges rise more than 10 times to 82 lakh a year because of the use of ICT.

Palak said Bangladesh was no longer a bottomless basket; rather it is a

model of development and possibilities.

"Now the youths raise demands for cutting internet costs, making internet available everywhere and setting up digital labs at every schools."

Thousands of students who graduate every year do not look for jobs. "Rather they want to be entrepreneurs, establish start-up companies and get access to finance," said the state minister.

At present, 40 percent of the services provided by the government are available online and it will go up to 90 percent by 2021. "The government is doing all this in collaboration with the private sector."

BASIS President Mustafa Jabbar thanked the present government for meeting all the demands of the ICT sector.

"Bangladesh's ICT sector has advanced so much that now we are exporting products in the area of Internet of Things to Japan whereas we are a country that used to import technology from Japan."

Bangladeshi firms have gained the capacity to meet the government's demand for IT and IT-enabled services and also raise the exports from the sector to \$5 billion by 2021, he said.

Selim RF Hussain said this admirable initiative is aimed at recognising the star performers in the ICT sector who are role models for future entrepreneurs and are helping people understand the importance of this sector.

He pointed out that the growth of smartphone and smart devices has resulted in accelerated internet penetration.

The response from IT-enabled services and software companies is commendable, and the country is starting to see a real surge in e-

commerce, he added.

In a video message, Sonia Bashir Kabir, managing director of Microsoft Bangladesh, said technology enables individuals and firms to do more.

"Bangladesh has every opportunity to make it big as all countries start from the same level," noted Sonia.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, said Bangladesh might be lagging behind many countries in many areas. But when it comes to IT, the country has advanced a lot and made extraordinary progress.

Some of the Bangladeshi IT companies are also doing well abroad, he noted.

"This proven success of some of our IT companies abroad shows that our IT has developed to global standards and a lot more can be achieved through collective efforts."

Constantinos S Gavriel, general manager of Le Méridien Dhaka, said he strongly believes that the winners of the awards would change the country and the economy for the better.

According to the ICT division, Bangladesh's export earning from the ICT sector reached \$800 million. It will cross \$1 billion landmark soon, riding on growth of more than 1,500 firms and 40 offshore development centres.

The sector got a huge boost in 2008 when Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina laid out the vision of building a Digital Bangladesh by 2021.

Since then, the industry has gone on to become a huge hub for freelance work via online marketplaces such as Upwork, punching with heavyweights like India and the US.

The government's target is to earn \$5 billion from exports of IT and IT-enabled services by 2021.

Two BAF

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Air force insiders said that the incident might have happened due to a mid-air collision.

Search operations were still underway as of filing of this report at around 9:30pm, reports our Cox's Bazar correspondent.

One of the aircraft crashed in Putibila village while another in Maispara of the upazila, a few kilometres away from one another, according to firefighters. The planes caught fire soon after the crash.

Shafayet Hossain, station officer of Fire Service and Civil Defence in Cox's Bazar, said firefighters rescued a pilot and sent him to Cox's Bazar Sadar Hospital.

Deputy Assistant Director of Fire Service and Civil Defence, Abdul Malik, who led the team of fire fighters said, "At 6:30pm, we heard about the incident and reached Putibila in an hour. We extinguished the fire at 8:30pm."

Parts of the plane had fallen in front of a house and locals panicked thinking it was an earthquake. One person sustained minor injuries while a fireman, Arif, was hurt while putting out the flames, he said, adding that when they reached Maispara, they could see only the wings of the plane, with a large portion buried in the mud and the fire having already gone out.

An Air Force helicopter was seen hovering in the sky, witnesses and police said. Officials from the air force, local administration and law enforcement agencies rushed to the spot.

Sirajul Haque, a local in Putibila area, said the aircraft caught fire with a loud bang. The crash caused panic among the locals. Onlookers swarmed to both places.

Officer-in-Charge of Maheshkhali Police Station Prodig Kumar Das, who was on the spot, told The Daily Star that he saw two parts of an aircraft ablaze in two separate places.

Pro-AL SCBA

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President Zainul Abedin and Secretary AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon over the review petition are politically motivated, unwanted and unexpected, said Md Ozi Ullah, vice-president of SCBA and also a leader of its pro-AL faction.

At a press briefing at the North Hall of the SCBA building, he said the SCBA president and the secretary are holding two vital posts of the BNP and that their statements on the petition are their own, not of the SCBA's.

Ozi Ullah said being aggrieved at the Appellate Division verdict, the government has filed the petition under article 105 of the constitution.

Filing a review petition is a constitutional right of the government, he said, adding that the review petition was now a sub-judice matter and that nobody had the right to make any statement or express any apprehension about the petition.

Awami League Presidium Member Yusuf Hossain Humayun, Bangladesh Bar Council Vice-Chairman Abdul Baset Majumder, SCBA Assistant Secretary Shafiqul Islam, Executive Member Habibur Rahman and Member Azhar Ullah Bhuiyan, among others, were present at the briefing.

Protesting the government's move to seek review of the SC verdict, SCBA President Zainul Abedin, also a vice-chairman of the BNP, on Monday said the government wanted to tactfully make a decision through the apex court to keep the judiciary under its full control.

The government has taken a stand against the apex court verdict that scrapped the 16th amendment and filed the review petition against the judgment as it doesn't believe in rule of law and democracy, he said at a press conference at the SCBA building's South Hall.

Speaking at the conference, SCBA Secretary AM Mahbub Uddin Khokon, also a joint secretary of the BNP, criticised the government's move.

Obama warns

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future of the US, Obama, who did not mention his successor Donald Trump by name, said he felt a sense of "serenity" on leaving the White House.

"There was a sense that we had run a good race," he added.

On his new routine, Obama told the prince: "I wake up later, it's wonderful to be able to control your day."

The prince opened the discussion by saying: "This is the first interview you've said 'yes' to doing since you handed over the reins", to which Obama replied: "that's true".

Harry is due to marry his US actress girlfriend Megan Markle on May 19 at St George's Chapel in Windsor Castle near London.

According to British press reports, civil servants are concerned that a wedding invite from the couple to Obama could cause a further rift between Britain and Trump following a series of high-profile spats.

Death toll from Philippine mall blaze rises to 38

AFP, Manila

The death toll from a fire that ravaged a shopping mall in the southern Philippines has risen to 38 after the body of a mall safety officer was discovered, the city mayor said yesterday.

The officer died trying to rescue those trapped in the blaze at the four-storey NCCC mall in Davao City on Saturday, the operators said.

Also killed were 37 employees of a 24-hour call centre for US-based market research firm SSI on the top floor of the building.

Mayor Sara Duterte, the daughter of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte, said one SSI employee is counted among the dead even though her body has not yet been recovered.

President Duterte, who hails from Davao City, has vowed to get to the truth of the blaze. Labour groups charged that the high death toll was a

sign safety rules were not met, a claim denied by the mall operators.

NCCC mall spokeswoman Thea Padua said in a statement yesterday that "we categorically deny the allegations that we do not have enough fire exits, extinguishers, sprinklers and designated fire escapes. We have been fully compliant with the labour standards."

The cause of the blaze has still not been determined. The justice and labour departments and Davao's fire-fighting bureau have ordered separate investigations.

It's murder

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developed a relationship with someone else, instigating him to kill her, he added.

Detectives are investigating the case and they may take Enamul on fresh remand following the development, the police inspector added.

ACC summons

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UAE through two shady organisations in the name of investment.

Wahidul Haque, Fazlur Rahman, another ex-managing director Shamim Ahmed Chaudhury, and former head of financial institutions and treasury Abu Hena Mustafa Kamal were directly involved in the money laundering, alleges the report.

The board of directors of the bank in December 2013 approved investment of \$20 million in Singapore-based fundraising and investment company Pinnacle Global Fund Pte Ltd (PGF) through the bank's Offshore Banking Unit (OBU).

In February 2014, the OBU laundered the money to an account of the UAE-based Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank (ADCB).

The account belonged to Cheng Bao General Trading LLC, which acted as a Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) or a mediator for the PGF. Cheng Bao

immediately withdrew the money and closed the account.

It could not be known where the money went after the withdrawal, as the AB Bank has failed to give the BB any substantial documents on Cheng Bao and the PGF.

The first generation private bank was also found to have signed the investment deal with the PGF on a white sheet of paper, raising questions about the deal's effectiveness.

A BB team unearthed all these in an investigation in late October this year.

The BB team has recommended removal of Wahidul from the AB Bank board in line with the Bank Company Act, 1991 and suspension of Abu Hena for their alleged involvement in the laundering.

The central bank also sent the report to the ACC on November 15.

Wahidul Haque resigned on December 21.

Prosecution concludes

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Mufti Abdul Hannan, also an accused in the case, which is not believable.

While talking about the testimony of 18th defence witness Abdul Majed Bhat, another accused, Rezaur said he is a Pakistani citizen and member of Kashmir-based militant organisation Hizbul Mujahideen.

He was sent to Bangladesh in 2000 to help several local militant organisations including Huji and he had a good link with the then BNP-led coalition government.

He also gave a confessional statement but later retracted, said Rezaur, adding that testimonies of other witnesses and his statement show arms and money for militant activities in Bangladesh came from Pakistan.

At this point, Rezaur mentioned the name of ISI -- Pakistan's intelligence agency -- but did not give details.

Later, Rezaur told reporters that three international militant organisations including Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba worked with local militant organisations and took help from the then administration to carry out the attack.

Advocate Akram Uddin Shyamol, who assisted Rezaur Rahman in the court, said they will cite verdicts from home and abroad including Bangabandhu and Rajib Gandhi murder cases.

BACKGROUND

Twenty-four leaders and activists of AL and its associate bodies were killed and over 300 others suffered splinter injuries in the August 21 attack. Sheikh Hasina, then opposition leader, narrowly escaped the attack with ear injuries.

A case was filed with Motiheel Police Station the following day. But the CID submitted two charge sheets, one for killing and injuring people and the other for supplying and using grenades. The second charge sheet was filed under the Explosive Substances Act.

During the tenure of the last caretaker government, charge sheets were filed against 22 people -- Abdus Salam Pintu and 21 Huji men, including Mufti Hannan. A further probe was launched in 2009.

A supplementary charge sheet was submitted against 30 accused, including Tarique Rahman, former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar and former Jamaat secretary general Ali Ahsan Mohammad Mojaheed, in July 2011.

In March 2012, the tribunal indicted 52 accused, including Tarique Rahman, on murder and criminal conspiracy charges while 38 accused were indicted in the case filed under the Explosive Substances Act. Now trial of both cases is being conducted concurrently.

The 11 other accused in the murder case were not implicated in the explosives case. They include three former

IGPs, three ex-CID officials, two former senior police officials, Khaleda's nephew Duke, and two former army officers ATM Amin and Saiful Islam Joarder.

Jamaat leader Mojaheed has already been executed for crimes committed during the Liberation War while Mufti Hannan and another Huji man were executed in the case filed over the grenade attack on former British high commissioner to Bangladesh Anwar Chowdhury in Sylhet. Their names were dropped from the cases.

Of the 49, eight accused, including three former IGPs, are now on bail while 18 including Tarique are absconding. Twenty-three, including Babar and Pintu, are now behind bars.

Serve country

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adding that the government wanted the newly-commissioned officers to maintain that success.

She said her government was working to turn the BMA into a modern institution by ensuring international standards.

Praising the Army for showing its capacity in various sectors, the PM said it recently played an important role in setting up shelter camps for displaced Rohingyas, distribution of relief and preparation of identity cards for them.

Riding an open jeep, Hasina reviewed the parade and took salute at the impressive march-past as the chief guest.

Chief of Army Staff Gen Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiul Huq and BMA Commandant Maj Gen Saiful Alam accompanied the PM.

The premier distributed awards among the best cadets for their outstanding performance in the academy.

Ministers, PM's advisers, lawmakers, the chiefs of the three services, diplomats, top civil and military officials and guardians of the newly-commissioned officers were present.

Earlier, on her arrival at the BMA parade ground, the premier was received by the Army chief, GOC of the 24 Infantry Division Maj Gen Md Jahangir Kabir Talukdar, GOC of Army Training and Doctrine Command Lt Gen Abdul Aziz and the BMA commandant.

A total of 350 cadets, including 343 Bangladeshis, five Palestinians and two Sri Lankans, successfully completed the 75th BMA Long Course.

Battalion Senior Under Officer Sadmanur Rahman received the Sword of Honour from the PM on being adjudged the best all-round cadet in the long course. He also obtained Army Chief Gold Medal for acquiring the highest standard in military subjects.

US, Germany urge China to release jailed activist

AFP, Beijing

The United States and Germany urged China to free an outspoken government critic known as "Super Vulgar Butcher" yesterday after he was sentenced to eight years in prison.

Wu Gan, who refused to plead guilty to charges of "subverting state power", was on Tuesday handed one of the harshest punishments meted out to a group of lawyers and activists swept up in a major crackdown two years ago.

"The embassies of Germany and the United States are deeply disappointed that Chinese human rights defender and blogger Wu Gan ... (has) been convicted on vague charges," a joint statement from the embassies said.

"We call on the Chinese authorities to release Wu immediately."

Wu was taken into custody in May 2015 just weeks before authorities unleashed a ruthless campaign later dubbed the "709" crackdown, rounding up over 200 people involved in activities considered sensitive by the ruling Communist Party.

The outspoken social media figure became the subject of the state's ire for using his larger-than-life online persona to draw public attention to human rights cases.

He called himself "butcher" because he saw himself as taking the fight to authorities, promising to "slaughter the pigs". He added "super vulgar" after complaints about his use of crude language to make his case.

His lawyer told AFP the harsh sentence was intended as an unmistakable

Crafting

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"All inmates at different prisons of the country are provided with trainings for their rehabilitation and are given all kinds of facilities. They are being given training in weaving and bakery. Gradually, the facilities will be provided in all jails," Asaduzzaman told reporters.

He said factories like the one in Narayanganj jail would be set up in other jails in phases.

Fariduddin Ahmed Chowdhury, secretary of the security service division under the home ministry; Brig Gen Syed Iftekhar Uddin, inspector general of prisons; Salim Osman, Narayanganj-5 lawmaker and BKMEA president; Shamim Osman, MP; Golam Dastagir Gazi, MP; Nazrul Islam Babu, MP; Ehtemshamul Haque, Narayanganj City Corporation CEO among others were present at the inauguration.

Colombia records lowest murder rate in four decades

AFP, Bogota

Colombia recorded its lowest murder rate in four decades this year in the wake of a peace deal with the leftwing FARC rebel group, the government said Tuesday.

There were "a little over 11,000 homicides" in 2017, Defense Minister Luis Carlos Villegas said, equating to a rate of 23 murders per 100,000 inhabitants.

That signified 320 fewer violent deaths this year than in 2016, he said, stating: "This year will go down in history as the safest in four decades."

The government's Forensic Medicine Institute has not yet released its data on recorded deaths for 2017. It said that in 2016 there were 11,532 homicides.

By way of comparison, the United States has a murder rate of 4.9 per 100,000 inhabitants, according to recent FBI data.

Much of Latin America suffers homicide rates higher than the world average of 5.3 per 100,000 inhabitants given by the World Bank.

In 2015, Colombia was classed as the third most deadly country in the region, after Venezuela and Brazil.

But, while Colombia still struggles with violence related to cocaine production and smuggling, it has seen a drop-off in the murder rate in the past few years.

Much of that is attributed to the end of hostilities between government and FARC forces following a historic November 2016 peace deal that put an end to half a century of conflict which claimed up to 25,000 lives each year.

Mesmerising

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group recital of the tabla, were students of Bengal Parampara Sangeetatalay. The young, talented group presented various rhythmic styling on their instruments as their guru, Pt Suresh Talwalkar, directed the performance.

One of the festival's biggest names, santoor legend Pt Shiv Kumar Sharma, came next. The maestro took the audience on a musical journey with a sweet Raga -- Jhinjhoti. Supported on the tabla by the masterful Pt Yogesh Samsi, Pt Sharma created magic on the santoor with his compositions on rupak and teentaal, closing with a calm, mellifluous dhun on Raga Pahadi.

Accomplished dhrupad (vocal) maestro Pt Ulhas Kashalkar performed Raga Jogkauns, in vilambit ektal and madhya laya teentaal. Until filing of this report, yet to perform on the night were eminent sitarist Ustad Shahid Parvez Khan, promising Bangladeshi artiste Avijit Kundu (dhrupad vocals) followed by a flute-sarod jugalbandi by Pt Ronu Majumdar and Pt Debojyoti Bose.

The second night saw a bigger turnout than the first one and despite dipping temperatures as the night wore on, many were seen aptly listening to the performances, walking through the conceptual architectural display by Bengal Institute or checking out an exhibition on the life and works of major figures in the history of Bangla and classical music.