

# PM flies to Rome this morning

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina leaves Dhaka for Rome this morning on a four-day official visit to join the upcoming meeting of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

She will present the keynote paper at the meeting on Tuesday.

Hasina will leave Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 9:55am by an Emirates flight and reach Fiumicino Airport, Rome around 6:45pm (local time).

She will be taken to Parco Dei Principi Grand Hotel in Rome where she will be staying during her visit.

Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Agriculture Minister Matia Chowdhury and Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali will accompany the PM.

The premier will go to the Vatican City tomorrow morning where she will be given audience by Pope Francis.

She will also hold a meeting with Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin and visit Sistine Chapel and Saint Peter's Basilica.

In the evening, Hasina will join dinner to be hosted by the Bangladesh ambassador in Rome.

On Tuesday, she will attend the inaugural session of the governing council of the Rome-based IFAD.

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# UN, US call

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the release of the two detained journalists and continues to press for that, Haq said.

The Myanmar mission to the United Nations was not immediately available for comment.

"As with other, previous reports of mass graves, this report highlights the ongoing and urgent need for Burmese authorities to cooperate with an independent, credible investigation into allegations of atrocities in northern Rakhine," US State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said.

"Such an investigation would help provide a more comprehensive picture of what happened, clarify the identities of the victims, identify those responsible for human rights abuses and violations, and advance efforts for justice and accountability," she said.

The Reuters report drew on interviews with Buddhists who confessed to torching Rohingya homes, burying bodies and killing Muslims in what they said was a frenzy of violence triggered when Rohingya insurgents attacked security posts last August.

The account marked the first time soldiers and paramilitary police have been implicated by testimony from security personnel in arson and killings in the north of Rakhine state that the United Nations has said may amount to genocide.

In the story, Myanmar said its "clearance operation" is a legitimate response to attacks by insurgents.

Asked about the evidence Reuters had uncovered about the massacre, Myanmar government spokesman Zaw Htay said on Thursday, before publication of the report: "We are not denying the allegations about violations of human rights. And we are not giving blanket denials."

If there was "strong and reliable primary evidence" of abuses, the government would investigate, he said.

There was no comment from the government following the publication of the report.

Nearly 690,000 Rohingya have fled their villages and crossed the border of western Myanmar into Bangladesh since August.

Human Rights Watch said Myanmar's military leaders should be held accountable in an international court for alleged crimes against the Rohingya population.

"As more evidence comes out about the pre-planning and intent of the Myanmar armed forces to wipe out Rohingya villages and their inhabitants, the international community ... needs to focus on how to hold the country's military leaders accountable," said HRW's deputy Asia director Phil Robertson.

Campaign group Fortify Rights also called for an independent investigation.

United Nations' Special Rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, David Kaye, said in a tweet: "During the reporting of this article, two Reuters journalists were arrested by Myanmar police. They remain held & must absolutely be released."

Yanghee Lee, the UN human rights investigator for Myanmar who has been barred from visiting the Rohingya areas, echoed that call and added in a tweet: "Independent & credible investigation needed to get to the bottom of the Inn Din massacre."

Police arrested two Reuters reporters, Wa Lone and Kyaw Soe Oo, on Dec 12 for allegedly obtaining confidential documents relating to Rakhine and have accused them of violating Myanmar's Official Secrets Act. They are in prison while a court decides if they should be charged under the colonial-era act.



British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson meets Rohingya refugees at a camp in Cox's Bazar yesterday. Johnson visited camps for Rohingya refugees who have fled from Myanmar, on his second day of a two-day visit to Bangladesh.

PHOTO: AFP

# It has to be 'safe, dignified'

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They do want to go back -- but they don't feel safe," Johnson said.

Johnson also assured of continuing its support to Dhaka on Rohingya issue saying the UK stands beside Bangladesh.

He highly appreciated Bangladesh's "incredible work" in making possible for Rohingyas to take shelter safely in Bangladesh.

He insisted the refugees were receiving "huge support from the UK" -- about £59m -- but added: "It's not just a question of humanitarian aid."

"It's about finding a political solution, finding an answer in Myanmar, from Burma, creating the conditions for a safe dignified return for these people."

The foreign secretary's trip to Bangladesh -- the first such official visit in a decade -- comes after nearly 700,000 Rohingya Muslims fled a military crackdown, which began last August.

Neighbouring Bangladesh has

agreed a timeframe with Myanmar for repatriating Rohingya people at a rate of 1,500 each week.

But aid agencies have joined the refugees themselves in expressing fears about the conditions and their rights and safety upon their return, reports the UK-based Independent.

The Burma Human Rights Network, while praising Johnson's visit to see the "desperate situation", said a return was unthinkable without "accountability" for Myanmar's oppression.

"It is not a good idea for them to return to Burma in these conditions," Kyaw Win, the organisation's executive director, told Sky News.

"The root cause of the problem is Burma side -- because Burma has committed genocide on the Rohingya people."

"When a country is committing genocide, we cannot look for a political solution. We need to have accountability for this to ensure this kind of condition is not repeated again."

Earlier, Johnson met Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Foreign Minister AH Mahmud Ali, to discuss how to resolve the crisis.

"I was really struck by how Bangladesh and the UK really share a common analysis of what needs to be done. We need to make those points together to the government in Naypyidaw," he said.

"The government of Bangladesh has shown immense compassion and speed and mercy in dealing with a challenge that I think any government would have found very daunting indeed."

The foreign secretary reached transit camp of the UNHCR in Kutupalang at 1:45pm yesterday and talked to some Rohingya people who took shelter in Bangladesh.

Later, he visited Balukhali camp and talked to Rohingya children at a child-friendly centre, reports UNB.

The foreign secretary saw and heard for himself the terrible things these

people have been through.

State Minister for Foreign Affairs M Shahriar Alam and British High Commissioner in Dhaka Alison Blake were present.

Earlier on Friday, Johnson said the plight of the Rohingya and the suffering they have had to endure is one of the most shocking humanitarian disasters of their time.

"This is a man-made tragedy that could be resolved with the right political will, tolerance and cooperation from all those involved."

The foreign secretary left Dhaka for Myanmar where he will be talking to State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi and other regional leaders about how they can work together to resolve this appalling crisis.

He will travel on to Bangkok for talks with Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-cha and also meet the chair of the Advisory Board on the Rakhine Advisory Commission, Surakiart Sathirathai.

# ROHINGYA CRISIS

## Four European delegations in city, Cox's Bazar

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Four high-powered European Parliamentary delegations have begun their visit to Bangladesh to see the plight of the Rohingya refugees for themselves and hold discussions on tackling the crisis with government officials.

The delegations are-- European Parliament's sub-committee on Human Rights (DROI), Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), Delegation for relations with the countries of Southeast Asia and the Association of Southeast Asian nations (ASEAN), and the delegation for relations with the countries of South Asia (DSAS) are currently in Dhaka and Cox's Bazar, European Union and foreign ministry sources said.

The EU has been praising the "exemplary role" played by Bangladesh in handling the Rohingya crisis under the leadership of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which has also been lauded by the international community.

The EU has also offered all sorts of assistance to Bangladesh regarding the Rohingya crisis and their repatriation to Myanmar.

The four delegations comprising eleven prominent Members of the

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# ZIA ORPHANAGE CASE

## Security beefed up at judge's village home

UNB, Rangpur

Security has been beefed up at the ancestral home of Judge Md Akhtaruzzaman, who delivered the verdict in a graft case against BNP chief Khaleda Zia, at Shahbaz village in Kaunia upazila of the district.

Mamunur Rashid, officer-in-charge of Kaunia Police Station, said they beefed up security at the ancestral home of Judge Md Akhtaruzzaman on Thursday, apprehending subversive activities following the verdict against BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia.

Earlier on Thursday, Judge Md Akhtaruzzaman handed down the verdict that convicted former prime minister and BNP chairperson Khaleda Zia and sentenced her to five years' imprisonment in the much-talked-about Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

# Self-sufficient in fish, meat

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However, some experts doubt the government's claim of becoming self sufficient in fish and meat.

**FLOURISHING FISHERY**

Fish accounts for almost 60 percent of Bangladesh's intake of animal protein and over the last three decades, fish production increased over five times, according to the report.

In 1983-84, the total fish production was only 7.54 tonnes and it grew at an average 6.60 percent over the last 10 years, it said.

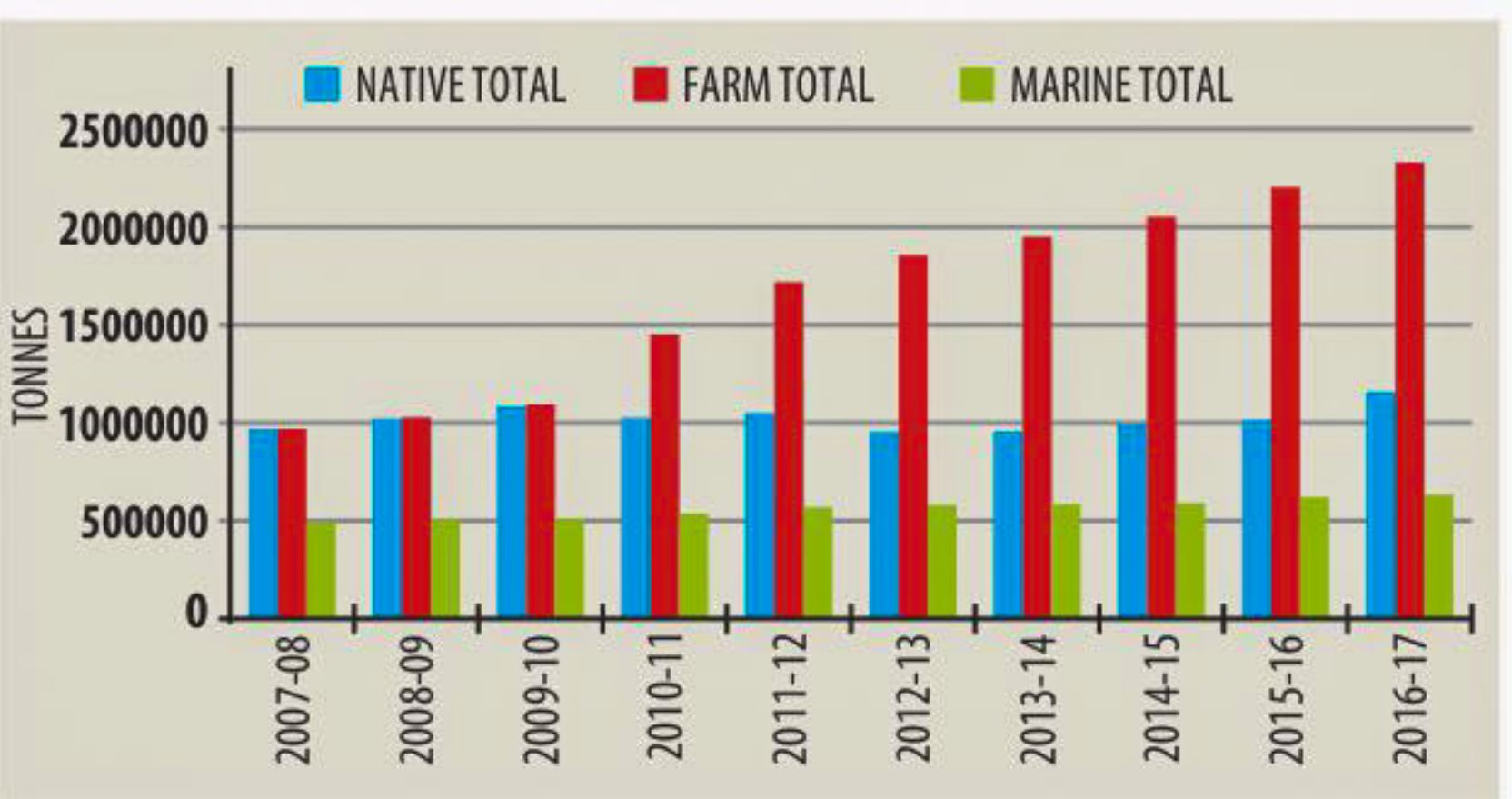
According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation's 2016 stats, Bangladesh is fifth in the world in terms of aquaculture production.

More than 11 percent of Bangladesh's population are engaged in fishing.

Inland open-water (capture) contributed 28.14 percent (11.63 lakh tonnes) and inland closed-water (culture) contributed 56.44 percent (23.33 lakh tonnes) to last year's production of 41.34 lakh tonnes, the report said.

"At least 84.58 percent of total production comes from inland."

Experts said once there were a



number of open-water resources with a wide range of aquatic diversity comprising almost 260 freshwater fish species. But due mainly to decline and degradation of wetland resources, the share of inland captured fish has reduced remarkably during the last few decades, they said.

In 1983-84, the contribution of inland captured and cultured fish to total production were 62.59 percent and 15.53 percent, respectively; whereas in 2016-17, it was 28.14 percent and 56.44 percent.

About 12 percent of the country's total fish production was hilsa, which increased from 1.99 lakh tonnes in 2003-04 to 4.96 lakh tonnes in 2016-17.

Bangladesh earns a considerable amount exporting fish, shrimps and other fish products. In 2016-17, the country earned Tk 42,876 crore exporting almost over 68,000 tonnes of fish and fish products.

Shrimp and prawn production increased from 1.60 lakh tonnes in 2002-03 to 2.45 lakh tonnes in 2016-17.

Bangladesh exports frozen shrimp and other fish and fish-related products to more than 50 countries, including Belgium, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, the USA, China, France, Russia, Japan and Saudi Arabia.

Gias Uddin Ahmed, dean of fisheries at Bangladesh Agricultural University, said, "In many areas, fishing has become unrewarding as catch per unit effort is extremely low. But poor fishers still try to catch whatever they can and destroy the natural resource."

He said as there is a land scarcity in Bangladesh and population is increasing, fish could be farmed vertically, like in a building.

**LIVELY LIVESTOCK**

Restrictions on cattle from India has become a boon for the country's livestock farmers. Many youths set up farms which helped the country achieve meat self-sufficiency for the first time.

According to the Department of Livestock Services, 48 percent of the meat comes from cattle (cow and buffalo), 40 percent from poultry and 12 percent from sheep and

goats.

Against a daily demand of 120 grams of meat per person, Bangladesh is currently producing 121.74 grams of meat per person, the department claimed.

"High-yield breeds, better profit margin and a huge employment opportunity are the reasons behind the success of the production," Md Ainul Haque, director general of Department of Livestock Services, told The Daily Star.

He said poultry revolution and a huge demand for meat encouraged the farmers. India's ban on cattle export to Bangladesh became a blessing for the country as thousands of youths invested in livestock, he added.

Syed Sakawat Husain, professor of animal breeding and genetics at the Bangladesh Agriculture University, contradicted the government's claim and said a good number of people were still deprived of meat every day. "The production has increased in many folds no doubt but still we have deficit. The government's claim is based on assumption, it is not scientifically true."

# BNP protests peacefully

## Plans sit-in, hunger strike

STAR REPORT

Police picked up around 130 BNP men from several districts yesterday as the party continued its demonstration against the conviction of its chief Khaleda Zia in a corruption case.

However, no major incident of violence was reported anywhere in the country amid a tight security.

The BNP also said it will form human chains across the country tomorrow, sit-in programmes on Tuesday and hunger strikes on Thursday, demanding unconditional release of the party chairperson.

While announcing the programmes at BNP's Nayapaltan central office in the capital, party Senior Joint Secretary General Rizvi Ahmed said the case filed against Khaleda was "false and politically motivated".

Earlier in the day, BNP men, led by some of the top leaders of the party, brought out a procession from House Building Lane area in Nayapaltan, chanting slogans calling for the release of Khaleda.

When the procession reached near Fakirapool area, police dispersed it by baton charge and chased the participants away, said witnesses.

The law enforcers arrested six BNP leaders and activists, including Nabiullah Nabi, from the areas nearby the party office, according to the BNP.

Khaleda landed in jail on Thursday after she was handed five-year imprisonment by a Dhaka court in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

The court also sentenced Khaleda's elder son and BNP Senior Vice Chairman Tarique Rahman, and four

others to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment and slapped a fine of Tk 2.1 crore on each of them.

Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, Rezaul Masud, additional superintendent of police (headquarters), Chittagong, said they arrested 24 BNP and five Jamaat-e-Islami activists during overnight drives in different upazilas of the district.

In Brahmanbaria, 28 BNP men were held in separate raids. The party did not stage any demonstration in the district yesterday.

Six BNP men were held in raids in Thakurgaon. Around 20-25 leaders and activists of the party staged demonstration in front of the party office. However, the law enforcers did not allow them to bring out any procession.

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A policeman tackles a BNP activist after dispersing a procession the party activists brought out at Bijoynagar yesterday afternoon. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN