

Why is BNP

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the electoral symbol of Awami League, in the next parliamentary elections and the upcoming elections to local bodies, the AL chief said her government was developing the country and the trend would continue. "We will make the country a prosperous one and free it from hunger."

Hasina said when AL comes to power, the country sees development, but the BNP "indulges in looting" when it rules the country. "What would one do for the country if he fails to check the greed of plundering orphans' money?"

About the Bangabandhu Memorial Trust fund, she said the previous caretaker government desperately searched for possible anomalies in the fund aiming to implicate her in a case, but it found nothing.

"Now you think what well-being can be done by them who can burn people to death," the PM said.

About the development works carried out by the AL government, Hasina said her government's main objective was to carry out development programmes and ensure people's welfare.

Referring to Bangla Bhai, a militant leader, she said the Rajshahi region was a safe haven for terrorists and militants, and none could sleep peacefully when BNP-Jamaat was in power.

"The BNP-Jamaat alliance had made Rajshahi a city of terrorism and created Bangla Bhai," she alleged.

Hasina said though the AL-backed mayoral candidate was not elected in the last city polls in Rajshahi in 2013, the government allocated huge funds for the development of the city. However, the incumbent mayor failed to implement development projects.

Mentioning that there was no Monga (famine) in the country's northern region anymore, she said her government ended the famine taking effective steps against it.

The AL's Rajshahi district and city units jointly organised the rally, with city AL President AHM Khairuzzaman Liton in the chair.

Earlier, the PM opened 20 development projects and laid the foundation stones of nine others by unveiling plaques at the madrasa ground.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina unveiling plaques of different development projects at a rally on the ground of Rajshahi Government Alia Madrasa. She also laid the foundation stone for nine other such projects.

PHOTO: BSS

A society 'encouraged to hate'

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terrifying consequences of hate-filled rhetoric of world leaders which threatens to normalise massive discrimination against marginalised groups globally.

Salil said the world last year was immersed in crises, with prominent leaders offering a "nightmarish vision of a society blinded by hatred and fear". This emboldened those who promote bigotry, he added.

"The feeble response to crimes against humanity and war crimes from Myanmar to Iraq, South Sudan, Syria and Yemen underscored the lack of leadership on human rights.

Governments are shamelessly turning the clock back on decades of hard-won protections."

ROHINGYA CRISIS

Security operations by Myanmar forces that began late August last year caused nearly 700,000 Rohingyas to flee to Bangladesh. Earlier waves of violence had previously driven over 300,000 other Rohingyas to Bangladesh from Myanmar where they have been facing persecution for decades.

A month after late August, at least 6,700 Rohingyas, including children, were killed, Doctors Without Borders said in a report in December.

Myanmar's security forces have been accused of rape and mass killings and burning of Rohingya houses. Though Bangladesh and Myanmar signed a

repatriation deal in late November, the influx from Myanmar still continues.

"If the Rohingya refugees were forced to return to Myanmar [by Bangladesh], they would be at the mercy of the same military that drove them out and would continue to face the entrenched system of discrimination and segregation amounting to apartheid," the report had said.

Severe restrictions imposed by Myanmar on aid groups working in Rakhine State worsened the suffering, it added.

"Those who remained in Myanmar continued to live under a regime amounting to apartheid in which their rights, including to equality before the law and freedom of movement, as well as access to health, education and work, were severely restricted," the report added.

The Myanmar security forces were primarily responsible for the violence, but the civilian administration led by Aung San Suu Kyi failed to speak out or intervene.

The international community, including the UN Security Council, too failed to take effective action or send a clear message that there would be accountability for the military's crimes against humanity, AI report observed.

HUMAN RIGHTS IN BANGLADESH

Amnesty International's report said enforced disappearances were committed in Bangladesh, and that the victims often belonged to opposition political parties.

It further said the proposed Digital Security Act would place greater restrictions on the right to freedom of expression and impose heavier penalties.

In Bangladesh, the government intensified its crackdown on public debate and criticism, and media workers were harassed and prosecuted under draconian laws.

"The government failed to hold accountable armed groups that carried out a high-profile spate of killings of secular bloggers. Activists regularly received death threats, forcing some to leave the country," it said.

REGRESSIVE POLICIES INSPIRE MOVEMENTS

The report also highlighted how leaders in various other countries also took hateful moves against the marginal communities and ignored human rights.

"The transparently hateful move by the US government in January to ban entry of people from several Muslim-majority countries set the scene for a year in which leaders took the politics of hate to its most dangerous conclusion," said Salil Shetty.

"The specters of hatred and fear now loom large in world affairs, and we have few governments standing up for human rights in these disturbing times. Instead, leaders such as Al-Sisi, Duterte, Maduro, Putin, Trump and Xi are callously undermining the rights of millions," he said.

However, the report says regressive

policies have inspired many people to join long-standing struggles, and detailed many important victories that human rights activists helped secure.

These include lifting the total abortion ban in Chile, achieving a step towards marriage equality in Taiwan and securing a landmark victory against forced evictions in Abuja, Nigeria.

It mentioned the vast Women's March centered on the USA and with offshoots around the world which showcased the growing influence of new social movements, as did the #MeToo phenomenon and Latin America's "Ni Una Menos" – which denounced violence against women and girls.

"The indomitable spirit of the women leading powerful human rights movements reminds us that the desire for equality, dignity and justice will never be extinguished. There is a palpable sense that protest movements are on the rise globally. If governments stand against such movements, they will erode their legitimacy," said Salil.

On a positive note, Salil said, "We are witnessing history in the making as people rise up and demand justice in greater numbers. If leaders fail to discern what is driving their people to protest, then this ultimately will be their own undoing.

People have made it abundantly clear that they want human rights: the onus now is on governments to show that they are listening," said Salil Shetty.

There is also a distinct possibility that the native Neolithic population of Britain had no resistance to some continental European diseases. There is some evidence from Europe that bubonic plague may have been the culprit.

If lack of immunity did wipe out much of Neolithic Britain's population, then demographers will regard it as a very early precursor of what we know actually happened to the American Indians as a result of European colonisation of the New World.

The genetic research reveals that the same sort of extreme population change did not occur on the continent. It's likely therefore that while Britain's island status no doubt protected or isolated it in some ways, it ultimately made the population much more vulnerable to eventual catastrophic change.

Today, in genetic terms, the Neolithic population of Europe substantially survives in only one place – Sardinia.

The genetic analysis of the prehistoric British skeletal material formed part of the largest study of ancient human DNA ever conducted. The study is published this week in the journal Nature.

The research was carried out by an international team of 144 archaeologists and geneticists from institutions in Europe and the United States including the Natural History Museum, the University of Cambridge and Harvard Medical School.



Moudud Ahmed, one of the counsels for BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia, speaks to reporters after the High Court accepted the appeal against her conviction in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case. The photo was taken on the HC premises yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Khaleda's appeal accepted by HC

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appeal by the High Court for hearing was a routine work.

"Now the records of the case will be sent to the section concerned of the High Court. The officials concerned will examine the records and prepare the case for its hearing," he said, adding that it would take at least three months for the HC to start hearing the appeal.

Replying to a question, Zainul, also the president of Supreme Court Bar Association, said it was not the right time now for making comments on whether the BNP chief would be able to contest the next general election, as the Election Commission was yet to announce the polls schedule.

Khurshid Alam Khan, lawyer of the Anti-Corruption Commission, told this correspondent that the HC would hold a hearing on Khaleda's bail petition on Sunday afternoon.

Eminent jurist Shahdeen Malik said the EC would decide whether Khaleda could contest the next parliamentary election.

The returning officer concerned would decide whether the BNP chief could contest the national election, if she submitted the nomination form ahead of the election.

According to the lawyer, the EC allowed ruling Awami League lawmakers Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya and Abdur Rahman Badi to continue as lawmakers even though they were convicted and sentenced by courts in criminal cases. The EC did so as the HC accepted their appeals against the convictions and sentences.

Therefore, the EC can allow Khaleda to contest the parliamentary polls, as the HC has accepted her appeal, Shahdeen added.

During the court proceedings yesterday, Khaleda's lawyer AJ Mohammad Ali prayed to the HC to grant bail to his client, considering her age and social status.

He said the HC might grant bail to Khaleda as she was handed a short sentence of five years' imprisonment and she had been in jail for 15 days.

Attorney General Mahbubey Alam prayed to the HC to give him time for taking preparation to place arguments on the bail petition. He said the petition contained many grounds and he needed time to go through it.

Khurshid told the HC that the ACC had to be given reasonable time under the Anti-Corruption Commission (Amendment) Act, 2003, to take preparation for placing arguments on the bail petition.

Meanwhile, the two judges left the courtroom for about 10 minutes after a pandemonium had broken out there during yesterday's court proceedings. Court sources said several lawyers shouted over entering, standing and sitting in the courtroom.

Earlier in the day, Khaleda filed a separate petition with the HC seeking bail in the graft case, although she prayed for bail in the appeal petition.

The ACC had filed the case with Ramna Police Station in July 2008, accusing the six of misappropriating over Tk 2.1 crore that came from a foreign bank as grants for orphans.

In the bail petition, Khaleda said there was a long-standing tradition of the courts of Bangladesh and the sub-continent that the law favoured granting bail to a convict or accused if she was a woman and the intent of the legislature appeared to be that bail should invariably be granted to a woman.

The BNP chief said she was 73 years old and was suffering from various chronic degenerative medical conditions.

Khaleda argued that she could be granted bail as she had been prime minister thrice and the leader of the opposition in parliament twice. She is also the chairperson of BNP and a senior law-abiding citizen.

She said she didn't misuse the privilege of bail during the trial and that her conviction as well as the sentence against her was based on misreading and misconstruction of evidence on record.

On February 8, Special Judge's Court-5 of Dhaka sentenced Khaleda to five years' rigorous imprisonment after it had found her and five others guilty in the graft case.

The court also sentenced Khaleda's elder son Tarique Rahman, now the acting chairman of BNP, and four others to 10 years' rigorous imprisonment each, and fined them a total of Tk 2.10 crore, saying that all the six convicts have to pay the fine in equal amounts.

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Slightly better, still a long way to go

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the global average score of 43, he said.

Besides, Bangladesh "embarrassingly" remains second lowest both in terms of score and rank among SAARC countries, better only than Afghanistan. It is also the fourth lowest among the 31 Asia Pacific countries, he said. "This is not acceptable at all."

The TI has been publishing the report every year since 1995. The index is based on perceived level of corruption in public sectors and misuse of public office or position.

Bangladesh was at the bottom of the TI scale for five years from 2001 to 2005. The country started doing better in the following years with its score rising.

Bangladesh's spot this year was shared by Guatemala, Kenya, Lebanon and Mauritania.

Bangladesh's rating is based on findings by eight globally-reputable survey sources. At least three such surveys are required to be eligible for inclusion in the TI index, he said.

The survey used data from 2016-2017, and no data generated by any of TI's local chapter was considered for the analysis or global rating.

The surveys, used for rating Bangladesh, are World Economic Forum-Executive Opinion Survey, Economist Intelligence Unit-Country Risk Assessment, World Justice Project-Rule of Law Index, Political Risk Service (PRS) International Country Risk Guide, Bertelsmann Foundation Transformation Index, Information Handling Services (IHS) Global Insight Country Risk Ratings, World Bank-Country Policy and Institutional Assessment and Varieties of Democracy Project.

REASONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

Bangladesh earned positive perceptions on potentials of legal, institutional and policy context, Iftekharuzzaman said.

Positive impression about benefits of digitisation, including e-procurement, also played a role.

However, although Bangladesh's spot and score have seen a rise over the last few years, it lacks speed and consistency, he said.

The factors that prevented Bangladesh from doing better include non-fulfilment of government's commitment to curb corruption; high-profile corruption rarely addressed; political and government position perceived as means of enrichment; unabated land, river and waterbody grabbing; weakening accountable institutions; denial syndrome, impunity; lacking in effectiveness and independence of the Anti-Corruption Commission; and shrinking media

TOP FIVE

Most corrupt | Less corrupt

Year	Rank from bottom	Score
2017	17	28
2016	15	26
2015	13	25
2014	14	25
2013	16	27

BANGLADESH'S POSITION

Country	Rank from top	Score
Bhutan	26	67
India	81	40
Sri Lanka	91	38
Maldives	112	33
Pakistan	117	32
Nepal	122	31
Bangladesh	143	28
Afghanistan	177	15

stakeholders and we are combating corruption in line with the strategy."

MA Mannan, state minister for finance and planning, termed the latest report as "good news," but said it was still not satisfactory.

"I personally think that we have a lot more work to do, a long way to go."