



Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue, usually one of the busiest streets in the capital, wearing a deserted look yesterday afternoon. Many residents are out of the city to spend a nine-day vacation they got by taking leave on Monday and Thursday in addition to three public holidays and two weekends. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

IRAN'S 'SECRET NUCLEAR FILES'

Experts find nothing new in Israel's claim

AFP, CNN

On a makeshift stage in Israel's Ministry of Defense, a high-walled, heavily guarded complex in the heart of Tel Aviv, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's show was about to begin.

After a technical snafu that required two wireless microphones before it was sorted out, Netanyahu revealed his first slide in a dramatic multimedia presentation, displayed on a screen that dwarfed the Israeli leader.

An image of an Iranian flag and a nuclear symbol framed the title page: "Atomic Archive: Iran's Secret Nuclear Files."

Moments later, as Netanyahu worked through video clips from Iranian leaders, two words popped up on screen in letters that were half as tall as the Prime Minister: "Iran lied."

Netanyahu's show -- and it was a show, broadcast live in prime-time and carried on CNN and other American cable networks -- was in full swing.

"Tonight, we are going to reveal new and conclusive proof of the secret nuclear weapons program that Iran has been hiding for years from the

international community in its secret atomic archive."

The prime minister walked over to two large display cases on stage and pulled down the black sheets that hid their contents.

This was Netanyahu's mother lode. This is what he wanted to show the world.

A wall of gleaming CDs containing 55,000 files purportedly from Iran's nuclear archive. And a cabinet of color-coded binders with another 55,000 pages allegedly from the same archive.

But does the new evidence suggest Iran violated the nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA?

Nonproliferation experts who spoke with CNN say Netanyahu provided no evidence that Iran contravened the terms of the agreement. Moreover, they say there was nothing new in Netanyahu's speech. And the other signatories to the JCPOA, with the notable exception of America, agree with that assessment.

"There's nothing new in the material that Netanyahu revealed yesterday."

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Can't force any party to join election

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and the UK. She visited Saudi Arabia and the UK from April 15-23 and Australia from April 26-29.

Hasina said the BNP did not take part in the 2014 election and it tried to resist the polls through vandalism and killings.

"You saw how the BNP, after assuming office in 2001, had pushed the country to the path of destruction... if they [people] don't want to push the country to the path of destruction again like in 2001, they will definitely cast their votes for Awami League and the party will come to power again."

"If they [people] think the development of the country should continue, they'll cast their votes for the 'boat' [the electoral symbol of the Awami League], and we'll come to power again."

About the BNP's demand of releasing Khaleda Zia from jail, Hasina said she did not send Khaleda to prison. "The court pronounced its verdict. It won't court placing demands before me.... They [BNP] have to fight back legally to free her from there."

About bringing back BNP acting chairperson Tarique Rahman from London, Hasina said the government would surely try to bring him back as a convicted criminal. "We are in talks with the British government.... we will surely bring back a convicted criminal, and for that, we will carry out the necessary process as per law."

She also ridiculed the BNP for its "political bankruptcy" over picking Tarique as its acting chairperson despite the fact that he had surrendered his Bangladeshi passport to the British government seeking political asylum. "Didn't they have any other capable leader for this particular post?"

About quota in government jobs, the PM said she had accepted the students' demand.

"There was nothing to get angry... the boys and girls placed the demand and I accepted it."

She, however, mentioned that the freedom fighters were disrespected during the movement.

"The way they were ridiculed and various derogatory remarks were made about them is just a dishonour to the freedom fighters. I won't tolerate any disrespect to them."

She said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman engaged himself in rebuilding the war-ravaged country after the independence. "For that, he provided special benefits to those lagged behind as well as the freedom fighters through the quota system. That was very much realistic."

Mentioning that some students

started the movement against the quota system out of nothing, the PM said, "They put up barricade on roads and prevented patients from going to hospitals. We tried to convince them and let them know the real scenario of the quota system."

In 1972, the Father of the Nation kept aside 30 percent quota for the freedom fighters, Hasina said. "But after 1975, there was no one to apply for government jobs under that quota. At that time, jobseekers were afraid of disclosing their freedom fighter identities as they knew they wouldn't be eligible for jobs if they disclosed this."

Hasina alleged that although Ziaur Rahman was a freedom fighter, he formed the government illegally.

She further alleged that Zia had stopped the war crimes trial process, took the killers of Bangabandhu along with him, gave indemnity to them and awarded them by posting them in various foreign missions. "At that time, the 30 percent freedom fighter quota had remained unfilled."

She asked the agitating students whether they do not know these things.

Hasina said the AL government started filling the 30 percent quota after coming to power. "But by the time, the freedom fighters had crossed their age limit for applying for government job. Then I made that quota available for the family members of the freedom fighters."

'RAISE AWARENESS AMONG PASSENGERS'

The PM urged all, particularly the media, to help raise awareness of passengers and pedestrians about abiding by traffic rules to curb road accidents.

"Drivers have to be punished. Well, we'll do it. But you [media] should create awareness so that passengers and pedestrians abide by traffic rules."

In the event of an accident, it is never considered that passengers and pedestrians might also be at faults, the PM added.

Hasina said there are footbridges and underpasses, but pedestrians hardly used them. "If anyone crosses a road by raising a hand before a bus and he or she falls victim to an accident... whom will you hold responsible...?"

She urged television channels to raise awareness about crossing streets safely. No one should dangle his or her hand outside the window while travelling by a bus, she said.

Pointing at recent incidents of losing arms in road accidents, Hasina said people were making an outcry for a person who lost a hand, but they did not think that the person did not

follow the traffic rule.

The Prime Minister went on saying: "Motorcycle riders don't use helmets and passengers don't fasten seatbelts in many cases... Why does a mother moving with her child runs suddenly while crossing a road? ...A speedy bus can't be stopped right away."

Hasina said sometimes drivers tried to speed away even after a minor accident fearing public wraths, which led to further fatal accidents in many cases.

ROHINGYA CRISIS

The PM said there would not be a major pressure on the country's economy for sheltering a million Rohingyas.

"For that, we've taken up a Tk-2,500 crore project ... we've already started the work, we're getting support and cooperation from all. So, there'll be no big problem for us.... The people of Bangladesh are well-known for their hospitality and humanity.... I don't think we have to face huge pressure for it."

The PM, however, admitted that all were coming up with their assistance as the issue was still at the initial stage.

"But it'll come down in the course of time and then the pressure will be mounted on us. We're taking preparations gradually to face that situation."

She said the ultimate target of the government was to repatriate the Rohingyas to their homeland, Myanmar, as quick as possible.

About the recent visit of the UN Security Council team to Bangladesh, she said several UNSC permanent members expressed their willingness to construct homes for Rohingyas after their repatriation to Myanmar.

FOREIGN TOURS

Hasina said the recent visits to Saudi Arabia, the United Kingdom and Australia further brightened Bangladesh's image in the international arena.

"The three visits have taken place in a short time. All the visits were important and I firmly believe that through these visits the image of Bangladesh in the world has brightened further."

On her tour to Australia, Hasina said she went to Sydney at the invitation of Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull to join the Global Summit of Women 2018.

At the summit, she received the prestigious Global Women's Leadership Award-2018 conferred by the US-based Global Summit of Women for her leadership role on female education and creating women entrepreneurship in Bangladesh and Asia-Pacific region.

Corporation (SpaceX), a US based firm, to launch the country's first geostationary communication satellite on its orbit.

The satellite, weighing 3.7 tonnes, has reached Florida on March 30 from Thales Alenia Space, a French satellite company that has manufactured it.

Bangladesh will be the 57th country in space once Bangabandhu-1 is launched.

A top official, requesting not to be named, said SpaceX is a famous company in this field and has so far launched 52 satellites of which 50 are now running successfully.

He said the government should primarily concentrate on the safe launching and then go for publicity; but is instead doing the reverse.

A unifying cause despite many rifts

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Today, the Middle East that nestles only 5 percent of the global population and yet 50 percent of all wars and deaths, is scalded by war and death with the OIC doing little to bring peace. Rather, an age-old rivalry between the two most influential members -- Saudi Arabia and Iran -- has exacerbated the tension with both sides jockeying for leverage on regional politics.

The insidious interest of the US and Israel in the Arab world and following divisive policies have left things even worse off. While wars rage in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, more war cries are heard centering Iran and Saudi Arabia.

The 2016 execution of an influential Shia cleric by the Saudi government has specially dimmed the relationship between the two countries both of whom exhort a lot of theocratic influence on the Islamic world. Things had rolled on to such extent when a Saudi cleric, clearly under government nod, had called the Iranians "not Muslims" which consequently led to boycott of the Hajj by Iranians.

The hiatus has come to a head now regarding the Saudi-Iran spat on Syria, the new threats perceived by the Saudis over Iran's nuclear deal that has lifted partially the sanctions on it by the West and the emergence of Israel as a new axis drawing force.

The fissure in the OIC appeared raw when in January 2016, when the OIC adopted an anti-Iranian resolution obviously backed by the Saudis, accusing Iran of terrorism. OIC's tradition of remaining neutral and solving problems with solidarity was waylaid in the process making the Muslim Ummah fraternity look frayed. This was despite the initial response of OIC secretary general Iyad Madani to seek a diplomatic solution to the tension.

The Syria cauldron has just heightened the Saudi-Iran tension with Iran supporting Syrian President Assad and the Saudis funding the rebels. OIC had earlier suspended Syria from its fold in 2012 for Syrian president's fight

against rebels. Syria was not even asked to defend itself and Iran was the lone voice to castigate the decision.

Things became even nastier when Russia, an observer of the OIC, took side of the Syrian government, making the land a ground for proxy war between many parties -- the Saudis, Iranians, the US and the Russian.

In its bid to hold sway over the Middle East, the Saudis have gone rough on other countries as well by intervening in Bahrain to quell as Shia unrest, by ostracising Qatar and building an ally against it on the ground that the gulf state funds terrorist outfits. Saudi Arabia has actually built a new front line against Iran and as part of it Bahrain, the UAE and Egypt have accused Qatar of threatening stability in the region.

But it is widely understood that at the back of it worked the Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani's praising of Iran's role in the region. Saudi media also reported a meeting of Qatar's foreign minister with Iran's head of Revolutionary Guard and Qatar congratulating Iranian President Hassan Rouhani on his recent electoral victory.

As part of its front building, countries like Somalia, Bahrain and Sudan received carrots of financial aid from Saudi Arabia if they cut ties with Iran.

Yemen is also burning caught in this Saudi-Iran confrontation and Saudi air strikes continue there to quell rebels backed by Iran.

Meantime, Israel which eyes Iran as its current main enemy in the region is taking new initiatives to bolster the Saudi front. Egypt has allowed Israel to bomb its own land to stamp out rebels against the Sisi government, an approval unthinkable even before the thing actually happened. Saudi Arabia has allowed air flight over it to Israel, another surprise not so big when Iran becomes a common enemy.

When so many issues thorn the OIC, the Dhaka OIC foreign ministers' conference offers the organisation a chance to show their solidarity again

on the question of Rohingya which has no link to the current tensions within the Middle East.

Since the recent Rohingya crisis began, the OIC has taken up the issue and urged Myanmar and the international community to resolve it. Its view of the persecution is akin to ethnic cleansing just as the UN has observed.

The ministers of foreign affairs of OIC Contact Group on Rohingya Muslims of Myanmar held a meeting on the sideline of the UN General Assembly in 2017 and called on Myanmar to immediately stop violence on Rohingyas. It has also asked the Myanmar government to return citizenships to the Rohingyas which was scrapped in 1982.

In January this year, a OIC delegation -- Independent Permanent Human Rights Commission -- visited the Cox's Bazar camps and saw for itself the situation. The Delegation report was adopted by the commission in April and it is the same report that would be submitted with recommendations to the OIC foreign secretaries' conference to begin in Dhaka on Saturday.

The recommendations are clear and welcoming -- early, safe and dignified repatriation of the Rohingyas with guarantee to their safety and access to their livelihood.

The foreign ministers will visit the Rohingya camps again on Friday before the day of the conference and it is expected that the plight of the hapless people would be a reason around for the divided OIC to be united again round on one important point -- to help humanitarian plight of the Muslim Ummah.

After all, it had set up its Department of Humanitarian Affairs in the 2008 conference exactly to come forward in cases such as the persecution of the Rohingyas.

A united stance can lead to a meaningful engagement of the UN Security Council on the issue even at bilateral level and thereby extracting a resolution on the issue and force Myanmar to take back its citizens.

Govt settles for costlier option

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floated a tender for the scanning operation in late December.

At least seven companies collected the tender papers. They are SGS, M/S Belal and Brothers, Harun Electrical Engineering, Linkers Enterprise, Five R Associates, NCSL and 5R Nuctech Consortium.

However, only two firms -- Five R Associates and NCSL -- submitted the tender papers.

The SGS did not submit the papers, alleging that the CCH relaxed some conditions of the bid to make it easy for certain companies to get the job.

On April 12, three days after the CCH recommended Five R Associates to the NBR for the job, the SGS moved the High Court over "irregularities in appointing an organisation of their choice."

In response, the CCH filed a writ on April 25 saying the claim was baseless. The HC is expected to hold a hearing on the matter on May 25.

The SGS also lodged a complaint with the Planning Commission. But the Commission cleared the CCH move to hire Five R Associates for the job.

Contacted, Mizanur Rahman, SGS operations manager, said they would not pursue the matter further.

"We have no complaints. We've knocked on so many doors. And we know we will not get justice," he told The Daily Star.

"Nine years ago, the Chittagong Custom House did not do the job as it had no experience. After all these years,



An articulated lorry goes through a mobile scanner in Chittagong port.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

they are now saying there is no need for experience to do the job. If so, the Custom House could do the job nine years ago, or it can do it now. Why are they relying on others for the scanning?" he said.

Meanwhile, after the SGS's contract ended on April 22, the CCH itself did the scanning job for the last one week.

"Workers from other departments were called in for the scanning operation. We did not face any problem," said Abdul Rashid, deputy commissioner of the CCH.

Liakat Ali Howladar, port secretary of Clearing and Forwarding Association,

said it was not safe to get the scanning job done by a private operator.

According to him, the job should be done by a government authority.

Asked why the CCH itself was not doing the job, its Commissioner AKM Nuruzzaman said they sent a draft proposal to the IRD for establishing a scanning department two years ago, but did not get any response.

"It's not possible to do the job with our current workforce. We cannot do it if we do not have a permanent, dedicated staff for it. We have talked about the issue with the authorities so we can do it by ourselves in future," he added.

Bangabandhu satellite

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USA to cover the launching programme.

The main government delegation was scheduled to leave Dhaka on May 4, but it has been suspended and is to be re-scheduled soon.

"It was scheduled to launch its final test run yesterday, but that has not been done," Mustafa Jabbar, telecom minister, told The Daily Star.

The test run might take place on Friday and it will take three to four days to analyse the data from the test run, said Jabbar. "So we cannot mention a new date before next week."

With this development, the government also needs to re-schedule its plan on massive celebrations across the country which was earlier fixed to be held on May 8.

A government delegation -- containing 42 members -- including two state ministers, nine law makers and at least six secretaries are scheduled to attend the launching program. Prime Minister's ICT affairs advisor Sajeeb Wazed Joy, who is now in the USA, will lead the delegation.

The total number of the delegations who would attend the launching program at Kennedy Space Centre in Florida will cross one hundred, said project related officials.

Most of the delegations' return tickets have been confirmed on May 12, and the satellite may not be launched by then either, officials added.

The government has appointed Space Exploration Technologies