

# Think about new leadership

## Hasina asks Awami League leaders, calls for introducing Nuremberg trial system for trying war criminals

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon Awami League leaders to think about the new party leadership.

Recalling the days when she was elected party president, the premier said long 37 years passed since she had taken over as the party chief.

"I think it is a long time. May be it is not right to be in the post for such a long time. You should think about the new leadership. I'll be always there for the party and the country," she said.

Hasina, also the AL chief, was addressing party leaders who greeted her at the Gono Bhaban on the occasion of her Homecoming Day.

The PM said if the party remained strong, united and beside the people, it would not be a problem to achieve anything. The AL has proved it repeatedly, she said citing examples from 1952, 1971 and other years.

She asked all the party leaders and activists to build themselves with the ideals of Bangabandhu who never did politics for his personal gains.

She emphasised on introducing a system in the country like that of the Nuremberg trial system under which there would be no need for producing any witness against war criminals.

"There is no need for any witness for holding trials of war criminals as documents are there. Judges in Nuremberg didn't take any witness account, and that trial [process] is still underway as the trial for war crimes committed during the World War II is going on. We can take such a step in our country also."

She said the witnesses of war crimes were facing attacks and torture. "I have received complaints about many such incidents and taken steps."

Hasina said the attackers of witnesses would also be treated as war criminals. "They also must face trial as war criminals...they must be awarded the capital punishment."

She called upon AL leaders and activists to look after the witnesses of war crimes and make sure that no one can torture them.

Hasina said Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman wanted to build the country and he got involved in massive development works after the country's independence.

The country's GDP was above 7 percent at that time when the conspirators struck, she added.

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## TWO MORE CASES Orders on Khaleda's bail pleas after July 5

COURT CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has to wait until July 5 to know the fate of her petitions seeking bail in two cases filed in connection with "undermining" the national flag and celebrating her "fake" birthday on August 15.

Two Dhaka courts were yesterday scheduled to pass orders on the bail petitions heard on April 25, but the courts kept those petitions in the case files without passing any order, said Khaleda's lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukder.

The courts also asked the officer-in-charge of Gulshan Police Station to submit on July 5 the reports on the execution of arrest warrants in "undermining" the national flag and celebrating "fake" birthday cases.

Meanwhile, upholding the bail granted to Khaleda by the High Court in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the HC to dispose of the appeal against her conviction by July 31.

Metropolitan Magistrate Md Khurshid Alam was conducting the case filed for celebrating "fake" birthday on August 15 every year, while another Metropolitan Magistrate Md Ahsan Habib conducting the case filed for "undermining" the national flag.

After Khaleda was convicted and sent to jail on February 8 in the Zia Orphanage Trust corruption case, she was shown arrested in seven other cases, including these two cases and four in connection with arson, filed in Dhaka, Comilla, Khulna and Narail.

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## Mysterious

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this correspondent on Monday.

Dropout girls' parents, who are looking for an educational certificate for their daughters without having to go through the trouble of providing proper schooling, contact him and ask for help, he said.

Jahangir then finds a way to get the girls registered with the Madrasa Education Board as students of Fazlul Haque Bohumukhi Mahila Dakhil Madrasa.

The madrasa, according to records, has been in operation for the last 22 years, said Jiban Kumar Bhattacharya, education officer in Brahmanbaria.

Jahangir says, "I have been enrolling students since 1996. The first batch sat for the exam in 1999."

Initially, the number of students was around 20-25, he said, adding that he would no longer be involved with the madrasa.

As this correspondent wanted to meet him in person, he agreed, but didn't show up on three occasions. His phone was found switched off since then.

This correspondent called the madrasa founder Fazlul Haque last week but he hung up after learning that the caller was a journalist.

According to the Madrasa Education Board, five students took part in the test in 2016. Only two of them passed.

Asked, Prof AKM Saif Ullah, chairman of Madrasa Education Board, said he would look into the matter.

"We served a show cause notice a week ago to each of the 96 madrasas where no student had passed and asked them to come up with rational explanation in 21 days," he told The Daily Star.

He added that measures would be taken if the institutions failed to provide "satisfactory reasons" behind their lack of performance.

The chairman also said of the 96 madrasas, there was only one student each in 15 while 14 other madrasas had about 2 or 3 students.

"We will definitely take action."

## Only 24 hrs

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Only 26 MPs participated in the passage of 24 bills between 14th and 18th sessions held last year, the TIB said.

The 10th parliament spent an average 35 minutes on passing a bill, the TIB said, adding that the Indian parliament spent 2 hour and 23 minutes on average to do the same.

In eighth and ninth parliament, the average time for passage of a bill was 34 minutes and 28 minutes respectively.

The eighth and ninth parliament spent 10 percent and 9.5 percent of their time on law making, the TIB added.

"Spending less time in passing a bill shows MPs are not interested in playing their due role. MPs lack interest in the law-making process," said TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman.

The TIB said opportunities for people's participation in law making was still limited due to rejections of proposals for seeking public opinion.

The anti-graft watchdog said discussions on bills were limited to only specific treasury and opposition bench MPs as only seven percent of the MPs took part in the law-making process.

Last year, 25.6 percent time of parliament was spent on budget discussions while 24.7 percent was spent on discussions on the thanksgiving motion on the president's speech.

The study said discussions, on budget and on thanksgiving motion, were marred by vulgar and provocative words used against political parties not represented in this parliament.

Use of unparliamentary language in parliament against the civil society and international organisations were also notable, it said.

The study said Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury could not take effective measures to prevent MPs from using abusive words.

On the parliamentary standing committees, the TIB said 46 parliamentary watchdogs held around 900 meetings in the five sessions last year while 42 com-

mittees held one meeting every month following the rules of the parliament.

Four standing committees did not hold any meeting last year.

About the positive sides of the present parliament, the study said average presence of MPs at every sitting has increased (88 percent) while participation of opposition MPs in the law-making process also increased.

Although presence of female MPs increased compared to their male colleagues, their participation in parliament's business was less.

The TIB study said the presence of ministers in parliament decreased.

The study said from the very beginning, the main opposition in parliament had been suffering from an identity crisis due to their double role in treasury and opposition benches.

It said it was also notable that the opposition, echoing the same voice of the ruling party, was criticising the political alliance that remains outside the parliament.

In reply to a question, Iftekharuzzaman said he still thinks the present parliament is like a puppet show stage. The opposition party does not know their actual role in parliament and why they are in the House.

Responding to another question, Iftekharuzzaman said the government and the opposition were responsible for the present parliament being unable to properly ensure good governance, accountability, and combat graft.

The TIB recommended the House passes a bill on the code of conduct for MPs to make the parliament effective and amends article 70 of the constitution. It also urged the Speaker to be firm in stopping the use of abusive words in parliament.

The Speaker refused to comment on the TIB observations and HM Ershad could not be reached over the phone.

## UNHRC adopts draft

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of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Working Group of the HRC in Geneva yesterday, the UN member states made 251 recommendations.

According to the HRC Secretariat and UPR, some 105 delegations took part on the third-cycle review of Bangladesh's human rights situation.

Of the recommendations, 167 were accepted, 60 were noted and the rest would be answered later. Bangladesh will give its final answer no later than the 39th Session of the HRC, slated for September.

Recommendations were made on the amendment of child marriage related law, implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Peace Accord, strengthening of National Human Rights Commission and allowing democratic space for political actors.

A good number of countries called for drawing up a plan of action to ensure full implementation of the peace accord.

Several countries, including Austria, Norway, France and the Netherlands, called upon the government to ensure that journalists, bloggers, human rights defenders and civil society organisations were able to carry out their activities without fear of surveillance, intimidation, harassment, arrest, prosecution or retribution.

Japan recommended ensuring a free, fair and inclusive general election, with full participation of all parties, and stepping up efforts to strengthen democracy in Bangladesh.

Others suggested that the government should train police officials adequately and instruct them to probe reports of harassment, attacks and death threats against journalists, media workers, human rights defenders and activists.

The member states urged Bangladesh to investigate all cases of murder and violence against journalists and bloggers and bring the perpetrators to justice.

The USA called for amending the Bangladesh Labour Act and Export Processing Zones Labour Act, in consultation with workers and employers, to ensure that provisions on freedom of association conform to international labour standards. Italy stressed the need for adopting further measures to guarantee workers' rights, also in line with the "Sustainability Compact".

Bangladesh agreed to examine the recommendations by 39th session of HRC. It also agreed to investigate all allegations of human rights violations by the police and security forces and take legal steps so that those responsible for enforced disappearances, custodial tortures and extrajudicial killings are held accountable.

## Trump

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she had a tryst with Trump in 2006 while he was married. The president denies the affair, and initially denied all knowledge of the payment, which Cohen has acknowledged was intended to stop her from going public with the allegations.

Trump's claim began to unravel early this month, however, after Rudy Giuliani, a new member of the president's legal team, said Trump had reimbursed Cohen for the sum paid to Daniels -- and the president himself subsequently acknowledged the repayment.

A footnote to disclosures submitted Tuesday to the Office of Government Ethics said Cohen had incurred "expenses" on Trump's behalf in 2016 of between \$100,001 and \$250,000.

"Mr. Cohen sought reimbursement of those expenses and Mr. Trump fully reimbursed Mr. Cohen in 2017," it said.

Trump's filing states that the president was not required to disclose Cohen's expenses, but was doing so in the interest of transparency.



This photograph taken on April 9, 2018, shows a Rohingya mother sitting next to her sick child, who is being treated at a Doctors Without Borders (MSF) clinic, at Kutupalong refugee camp in Ukhta.

## Some 60 babies born a day: UN

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have survived displacement, violence, trauma and, at times, rape," said Edouard Beigbeder, Unicef's Representative in Bangladesh.

UN Security Council envoys visited the refugee camps in April.

"It is impossible to know the true number of babies who have been or will be born as a result of sexual violence," Beigbeder said. "It is vital that each and every new and expectant mother and every new-born receive all the help and support they need."

Rohingya insurgent attacks on security posts in Myanmar's Rakhine state last August sparked a military operation that Myanmar has said was legitimate. Last November, Myanmar's military released a report in which it denied all accusations of rape by security forces.

A senior Bangladesh health ministry official, who declined to be named due to sensitivity of the matter, said last week that so far 18,300 pregnant women had been identified in the camps and the rough total estimate was around 25,000, reported Reuters.

In March the United Nations launched an appeal for \$951 million to help the Rohingya refugees for the rest of the year, but it is less than 20 percent funded.

## RAPE VICTIMS

Aid workers are scouring the world's largest refugee camp for pregnant Rohingya rape victims, with a rush of births anticipated nine months after Myanmar forces unleashed "a frenzy of sexual violence" against women and girls from the Muslim minority.

Specialists and Rohingya volunteers are racing against time to find women in the giant camp who are thought to be hiding their pregnancies out of shame, as fears grow that newborns could be abandoned and new mothers may die without care in coming weeks.

Tosminara, herself a Rohingya refugee, has spent months coaxing these women out of the shadows, promising discretion.

"We tell them a password they can use when they arrive at the hospital or health post. The guard then sends the woman directly to the right spot," said Tosminara, who goes by one name.

"They often are shy. Sometimes they are afraid to come forward."

The Myanmar army crackdown last August drove roughly 700,000 Rohingya into Bangladesh and the number of pregnancies resulting from rape is not known.

But UN Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights Andrew Gilmour said there would "inevitably" be a spike in births soon given the "frenzy of sexual violence in August and September last year".

Marcella Kraay of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) also said "a fair number of pregnancies" were expected.

An estimated 48,000 women will give birth in the camps this year. Those who were raped will be delivering imminently, mostly in secret and without medical care on the floors of bamboo shacks overlooking the Bangladesh-Myanmar border.

Rohingya community leader Abdur Rahim said he knew two women personally who were raped by soldiers and due within the month. He had heard rumours of many others in a similar position, he added.

"The Myanmar military raped them. These babies are... evidence of their crimes," he told AFP.

## TRAUMATISED AND ALONE

Tosminara says she is trying her best to find these women in the heaving camps. But volunteers must contend with a deep-rooted stigma that keeps many from revealing their ordeal.

"Sometimes neighbours say 'don't do anything, it will humiliate you

further'. So they don't want to come," said Nurjahan Mitu, a doctor who trains midwives through a UN Population Fund programme.

Many have sought clinical help to terminate pregnancies -- legal in Bangladesh up to 12 weeks.

Others have resorted to underground options resulting in "complicated, incomplete abortions", said MSF midwife Daniela Sofia.

The UN's Gilmour, who toured the camps in March, said girls as young as 14 were self-inducing abortions.

Sofia, the midwife, assisted a 16-year-old with an abortion after the teenager arrived at her clinic in secret, terrified that her family would find out.

She said the girl was pregnant after being gang-raped by Myanmar soldiers, but had no one to support her through the trauma.

"Nobody knew about the rape. Her family were not aware of it," Sofia told AFP.

More than half the Rohingya who have fled into Bangladesh are women and girls.

Children are seen everywhere but adolescent girls are largely invisible, many kept indoors by families concerned for their welfare, experts say.

Experts are concerned that families could forcibly marry off teenage girls to cover up a pregnancy.

Others fear that newborns could be abandoned.

MSF alone treated 311 rape victims -- women and girls aged between nine and 50 -- between August and March but Kraay said this was "the tip of the iceberg".

On top of the refugees' accounts, UN Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict Pramila Patten said rape was used as a "calculated tool of terror" to force the Rohingya out of Myanmar.

## No date for repatriation

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who led the Bangladesh side at yesterday's meeting.

The Myanmar side was led by its Permanent Secretary Myint Thu.

The first meeting of the JWG was held on January 15 in Naypyidaw.

On February 16, Bangladesh handed over a family-wise list of 8,032 Rohingyas to Myanmar at a meeting in Dhaka.

Since then, Myanmar has sent back the names of only 1,000 Rohingyas after verifying their residency in Rakhine. But none of them has been repatriated yet.

Rohingya community leaders and experts have criticised the provision of verification of Rohingya residency, arguing that they fled their homes that were torched, and it was illogical to expect that they would have documents to prove their residency.

Dr Wakar Uddin, a Rohingya community leader based in the US, recently told The Daily Star that it was funny to think that Bangladeshis would want to go to Rakhine.

"So, why is the verification?" he said, adding that verification was meant to complicate the repatriation.

Myanmar officials have alleged that the verification forms sent to Myanmar were not properly filled out by the Rohingyas in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh officials, however, have refuted the allegation.

The foreign secretary yesterday said, "We have not given them [Myanmar] any flawed list. They also did not make any mistake. We are discussing that. They will slowly verify the list of the Rohingyas."

The Myanmar permanent secretary did not say anything about the reasons behind the delay in the repatriation process or the challenges in verifying the refugees.

"We are here for that. We will accelerate the process. We are working on that," he told reporters, adding that they would hold more meetings and

devise a mechanism to receive the Rohingyas in Myanmar.

"We will be working hand in hand based on the agreement. We will work it out and then the repatriation will start," he said without giving any time frame.

In a statement last night, the Bangladesh foreign ministry said Dhaka stressed the need for creating a conducive environment in Rakhine, which includes safety and security of the returnees, rebuilding villages, access to livelihood and freedom of movement.

To build confidence among the Rohingyas to return to Rakhine, the Bangladesh side also emphasised "verifiable concrete information" from the Myanmar side for sharing it with the refugees.

Seeking anonymity, two Bangladesh officials, who attended yesterday's JWG meeting, told this newspaper that the Myanmar side agreed to the proposal for a Bangladesh delegation's visit to Rakhine. But the date was not fixed.

One of the two officials said, "We told the Myanmar side that it is not enough to say that things are improving and fine in Rakhine. They have to give the UN and other aid agencies, and the media unfettered access to Rakhine."

The Myanmar officials told the meeting that Naypyidaw would sign an agreement with the UN Refugee Agency and the UNDP soon to allow them to work in Rakhine to help with the repatriation, added the official.

The other Bangladesh official said that when the issue of Rohingya citizenship was raised, Myanmar officials said the refugees will have to apply for National Verification Card (NVC), which will eventually lead to their citizenship.

"We told the Myanmar officials that the Rohingyas don't want the cards because they have to identify themselves as Bangalees in those.

"The Myanmar side said they will consider removing this option from the form."

The Myanmar side also said they were working to promote inter-faith harmony and taking confidence building measures and promoting development to upscale economic progress in Rakhine, one of Myanmar's poorest states, mentioned the official.

"There is no short cut to solving the Rohingya problem ... It has to be sustainable," added the official.

The Rohingyas, who experienced killings, rapes, burning of their houses and other forms of torture in the brutal military crackdown, say they want guarantee of citizenship, recognition of Rohingya ethnicity, security under the UN presence in Rakhine and return to their homes, not to the camps that the Myanmar authorities have set up.

UN Security Council members, who recently visited Rakhine, said the conditions were not conducive for the return of the refugees to Rakhine, where they have been denied citizenship, government jobs, higher education, right to free movement and healthcare since 1982.

## EU reaches out to Balkans, under Trump's shadow

AFP, Sofia

European Union leaders anxious to counter Russian influence yesterday sought to reassure Balkan states about their long-promised membership prospects, but warned they would not be joining any time soon.

EU leaders met their counterparts from six Balkan countries for summit talks in Sofia, a day after a dinner that sought to forge a united front in the face of US President Donald Trump's "capricious assertiveness" on the Iran nuclear deal and trade tariffs.