



A scale model of a metro rail train being built at the Sonargaon intersection in the capital yesterday for Awami League's grand reception for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Suhrawardy Udyan on Saturday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

May's party denies 'cheating' in Brexit parliament vote

AFP, London

Britain's ruling Conservative party yesterday rejected accusations of dirty tricks after breaking a voting pact with an opposition MP on maternity leave on a crucial piece of Brexit legislation.

Liberal Democrat deputy leader Jo Swinson, who gave birth to a boy last month, accused the government of "cheating" the system as it sought to win two knife-edge votes on Tuesday night.

"Just how low will your government stoop?" she raged on Twitter. Prime Minister Theresa May said her party's failure to uphold the so-called pairing deal was "done in error", but admitted it was "not good enough" and would not happen again.

Rejoinder

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Sarak Paribahan Sramik Federation several times to discuss different problems in the road transport sector and we held several meetings to stop extortion in the sector. In the meeting, the Sramik Federation proposed checking extortion. But our proposal was not controlling of extortion. Rather, there will be no extortion on roads and at terminals. Tolls will be collected at different offices. Workers will give toll at their offices, owners will pay toll at their offices. The Sramik Federation is yet to agree on the matter. If we can reach an agreement with the Sramik Federation, we will inform it to you. Owners at the meeting agreed to it. The rejoinder also said the report published in this paper created confusion between the two platforms.

OUR REPLY

A correspondent of The Daily Star was present at the Samity's biannual general meeting at Mahanagar Natya Mancha in the capital on July 17. In the programme, the president and the secretary general gave separate speeches. We ran the story based on their speeches. The Daily Star has the audio recording of their speeches.

Mysterious

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Being skeptical of the incident, some villagers contacted the Election Office in Badalgachhi upazila to verify whether any of its officials was sent to the village. But the office confirmed that it didn't send anybody and no survey was underway over the distribution of smart NID cards.

On July 11, one of the victims filed a general diary with Badalgachhi Police Station in this regard.

However, police are yet to identify the two men involved in the incident.

About 1,000 people have been cheated, said Yaad Ali, a member of Bilashbari Union Parishad.

Mosharaf Hossain of Hajipur village said they hardly could imagine that they would be cheated in such a way.

"We helped them [the two men] with all information and support to get the smartcards," he added.

Shafiuddin Sheikh, upazila election officer, said the local administration recently made announcements through loudspeakers in the upazila urging people not to provide any information to unidentified people.

Jalal Uddin, officer-in-charge of Badalgachhi Police station, said they were working hard to identify the two men.

Pillows for jail inmates

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prisoner as it was necessary for a sound sleep. If anyone failed to sleep properly, it would create psychological complications and the person might not able to work properly.

He added that the initiative of providing pillows to prisoners was a part of turning jails into correctional centres.

"We have already purchased some pillows in the last fiscal year after receiving approval from the home ministry and are buying some more this year," the IG said.

Primarily, pillows would be distributed among the prisoners of major jails and would gradually be distributed in all jails, he said.

At present, there are around 76,000 prisoners in 68 jails across the country, Central Jail officials informed.

Earlier in 2007-08, jail authorities tried to arrange pillows for inmates, but the initiative did not come to fruition after fears that inmates might lock into clashes over pillows or use it for suffocating others to death.

However, a former high official of prison directorate requesting ano-

nymity told The Daily Star that the idea was completely baseless as he believed prisoners would never fight over pillows.

The government has taken a great initiative by arranging pillows for inmates, he said, adding that prison authorities needed to make sure the pillows were clean and washed regularly once distribution was over. They also needed to check whether any prisoner was using the pillows for criminal activities, like hiding narcotics or mobile phones.

Suriya Akter, additional inspector general (finance) of prison directorate, said they bought the pillows through tenders.

Jail officials informed that the prison directorate has already bought 16,420 pillows at a price of Tk 300 each, including covers and the companies providing the pillows are supposed to provide one year damage warranty.

They would buy 64,000 more pillows in the current fiscal year in two phases, while 50,355 pillows are to be bought and delivered within the next three months, they said.

Increase use of jute

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days of jute and its products, she added.

She mentioned that scientists have already invented a jute-made biodegradable poly bag called Sonali Bag.

Bangladesh Jute Mills Corporation is producing Sonali Bag as a substitute for the polythene bag, which is harmful to the environment and human health.

The PM said people can use Sonali Bag as the substitute of poly bags.

Fashionable bags were being produced from jute, the PM said pointing at her handbag. "This is also made of jute."

New jute products have ushered in huge potentials for Bangladesh as the pollution issue came up globally, she told the programme.

Hasina said Bangladesh is a jute-producing country and its diversified use can be beneficial for it both environmentally and economically.

She also urged all to go for reusing plastic products or refuse it totally as protection of the environment was very important.

Briefly describing various programmes of her government for protecting the environment, the PM said the government has drawn up plans for housing, industry and economic zones so that the environment could be kept intact.

She said the monitoring and enforcement of the Department of Environment has been stepped up.

To make the department stronger, Hasina said the government has already created 468 new posts in addition to the existing 267.

Environment Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud, Deputy Minister for Environment Abdullah Al Islam Jakob and Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Environment, Forest and Climate Change Ministry Hasan Mahmud, among others, spoke at the programme.

The theme of this year's World Environment Day is "Beat the Plastic Pollution" with the slogan -- If you can't reuse it, refuse it.

This year's theme for the National

Tree Plantation Campaign and Tree Fair is "Live in Green, Protect the Green and Decorate the City-life-Environment".

Hasina also inaugurated plantation of 30 lakh saplings to pay tributes to 30 lakh martyrs of Liberation War by planting a Chatim sapling at the BCCI compound.

Earlier, she handed over Bangabandhu Award for Wildlife Conservation, National Environment Award and Prime Minister's National Award for Tree Plantation at the event.

She also inaugurated the National Environment Fair and National Tree Fair 2018 at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar and went round different stalls at the fair.

Militant group

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A PTI spokesman also confirmed yesterday that Khalil was backing their party in elections but will not be joining their ranks officially as a party member.

Khalil, an Islamabad-based cleric, is accused by the United States of plotting terror attacks in Pakistan, Afghanistan and India and of nurturing close links with Osama bin Laden, who was killed in Pakistan's northern city of Abbottabad during a raid by US special forces in 2011.

The US State Department describes HuM as "a Pakistan-based terrorist organisation that seeks the annexation of Kashmir into Pakistan and poses a direct risk to US, Afghan, and allied interests in Afghanistan".

Pakistan earlier this year amended its anti-terror laws to ban those listed as terrorists by the United Nations from running in elections.

Former cricketer Khan -- who led Pakistan to World Cup victory in 1992 -- has repeatedly called for holding talks with militants, earning him the moniker "Taliban Khan" in Pakistan.

Khan was also lambasted by critics for entering into an political alliance earlier this year with Sami ul Haq -- the so-called Father of the Taliban whose madrassas once educated Taliban supremos Mullah Omar and Jalaluddin Haqqani.

China's robots

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its destination.

This "little yellow horse" is an autonomous delivery robot, ferrying daily essentials like drinks, fruit and snacks from the local store to the residents of the "Kafka" compound in the Chinese capital.

Equipped with a GPS system, cameras and radar, the robots are seen by their creator as the future of logistics in China, where he says one billion packages will eventually be delivered every day.

Travelling at a less than overwhelming three kilometres (two miles) per hour -- a slow human walk -- the robot has room for improvement, said one customer as she removed a packet of nuts from its bowels.

"The weak point is that it cannot deliver directly to the door like a human," said the customer, who does not live on the ground floor.

"But it's still quite practical. The robot delivers relatively quickly," she said.

The robot takes advantage of Chinese consumers' love of cashless payments and smartphone shopping.

To get a delivery via the "little yellow horse", the customer selects the desired products, taps in the address and pays via their phone.

The supermarket staff place the items in the robot, and the robot bustles off.

Liu Zhiyong, founder and CEO of Zhen Robotics, which manufactures the robot, sees a bright future for his yellow creation.

"At the moment, there are 100 million packages delivered every day in China. It will be one billion in the future," Liu told AFP.

"There will not be enough humans to make the deliveries. We need more and more robots to fill this gap in manpower. And to reduce costs," added the CEO.

These costs are especially high in the last kilometre of a delivery, where precision is key and a customised service is required to get the product to the front door.

At the moment, the yellow robots in the Kafka compound have little to trouble them, moving along a wide pavement with no obstacles -- and no cars.

Weighing 30 kilograms (around 65 pounds) and with a theoretical top speed of 12 kilometres per hour on their six wheels, the robots have four cameras constantly scanning the world around them and a laser tele-detection system allowing them to avoid obstacles.

Bus knocks

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market, Faruk ran to the bus to help Swapna and Manuja get off when another bus came and hit him.

Faruk received a head injury from being hit.

Eyewitness Raju Islam, who works at a roadside food stall, said when Faruk was going towards the bus, the other bus hit him and sped away. Some people chased it down towards Elephant road.

Officer-in-Charge (OC) of Shahbag Police Station Abul Hasan said after receiving information, the bus was seized when it was at Science Laboratory, on its way from Jatrabari to Mohammadpur.

Police have also detained the driver, Amirul Islam, he said.

Faruk was rushed to DMCH, where he was declared dead, SI Bachchu said. His body was sent to DMCH morgue for autopsy, where sources said there was a head injury, which is possibly the cause of his death.

Committee for quota

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which will expire on Monday.

After its formation, the committee held only one meeting on July 8, where it decided that it would study reports on the quota system prepared by previous committees and a commission.

The committee also decided to review such quota provisions in other countries before putting forward its suggestions.

At the time, the committee hoped they would complete the task within the given time.

However, a second meeting could not be held as the cabinet secretary fell ill, said sources in the committee.

Given the situation, the committee will ask for the deadline to be extended by 90 working days and will send a proposal in this regard to the prime minister for her approval, the sources said.

The committee is likely to hold the second meeting on Sunday if the cabinet secretary recovers from his illness.

Other members of the committee are secretaries to public administration ministry, finance ministry, Liberation War affairs ministry, law ministry (legislative division), Public Service Commission, and the secretary to the Prime Minister's Office.

The government formed the committee amid protests by students and jobseekers demanding reformation to the quota system.

In February, students of different public universities, along with jobseekers, gathered under the banner of "Bangladesh Sadharan Chhatra Adhikar Sangrakkhan Parishad" and waged a movement demanding reforms in the quota for civil service.

In late April, students of public and private universities across the country took to the streets and blocked key points in the capital and roads and highways elsewhere.

Amid the protests, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in parliament on April 11 spoke about abolishing all types of quotas in public jobs.

But as no gazette notification was issued in this regard, the protesters started an indefinite boycott of classes and examinations in all universities and colleges on May 14.

Afterwards, the PM on July 12 in parliament said it was not possible to reform the freedom fighters' quota in public jobs due to a High Court verdict.

PROTESTS CONTINUE

Under the banner of "All Combined Departments", around 500 students from different departments of Dhaka University formed a human chain on the Central Shaheed Minar premises in Dhaka, demanding exemplary punishment for those who attacked the quota reformists.

Holding various placards protesting the recent attacks, they also demanded the release of quota reform leaders who are under arrest and a safe campus for all.

"We urge the government to withdraw all the cases filed with different police stations during the quota reform movement in April," said Nahid Islam, a student of university's sociology department, at the programme.

Those who attacked students and teachers at DU and Rajshahi and Chittagong universities will have to

be identified and brought to justice, he added.

Expressing solidarity with the students, assistant professor of DU's economics department Rushad Faridi said, "Human chains were held on the campus over trifling issues before but the students are now afraid to stand at the Shaheed Minar as the BCL has created terror on the campus."

He said he had talked with some BCL leaders who told him that they [BCL] attacked the protestors as there was a presence of anti-liberation forces and those who attacked the VC residence among the protestors.

"I told them vandalising the VC residence is a crime but arrest them [those responsible] with proper evidence. But they [protestors] are being placed in remand without any evidence," he said.

He also said that some university students became "cadres" as they were brainwashed by the BCL men.

"Chhatra League activists believe in a kind of ideology. The mechanism of brainwash starts in the first year and the visitor's room is the training camp of cadres."

"When a fresher enters the visitor's room, he goes under so much torture that his mentality changes after some time. He does not remain a "normal student", he claimed.

Elsewhere, students of the university's history department formed a human chain programme at the Aparejeyo Bangla premises, protesting the recent attack on their fellow student Tanzir Hossain Sarker and demanding a safe campus for students.

Associate professors Golam Saklayen Saki and MM Kawser were present at the human chain joined by around 200 students of the department.

Later, the students brought out a silent procession from the spot.

Boycotting regular classes and examinations, several hundred students of Jahangirnagar University yesterday also formed a human chain on the campus protesting the recent spate of attacks on some teachers and students and demanded reformation in the existing quota system.

Meanwhile, Naripokkho, an organisation working for women's rights, yesterday expressed resentment and concern over the continuous physical assaults by BCL members on students demanding quota reforms and the teachers who stood by them.

In a statement, the organisation said the most condemnable incident was the sexual assault on the female participants in the quota reform movement.

Describing the July 2 attack on Moriom Mannan Farah, a first year honours student of Tejgaon College, at the Central Shaheed Minar and another incident which took place in April, the organisation said, "Naripokkho is extremely annoyed, concerned and ashamed of these incidents."

Criticising the role of the government and university authorities, the statement expressed the organisation's demand that the PM take stern steps to stop such "heinous activities of BCL" and establish rule of law in the country.

Trump bitterly

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"higher ends" of the US intelligence community thought highly of his performance at a press conference where he seemed to take the word of the Russian president over that of his spy agencies on the question of Russia's election interference efforts in 2016.

"So many people at the higher ends of intelligence loved my press conference performance in Helsinki," Trump wrote on Twitter early yesterday morning. "Putin and I discussed many important subjects at our earlier meeting. We got along well which truly bothered many haters who wanted to see a boxing match. Big results will come!"

The president has come under heavy criticism over the past 48 hours over his meeting with Putin, seen by many as overly warm and absent the type of confrontation that many have argued was merited by Russia's recent spate of bad behaviour on the world stage. Most notably, Trump at one point told reporters at a press conference that he saw no reason why the Kremlin would have been behind a campaign of cyberattacks targeting the 2016 US presidential election, contradicting the assessment of the US intelligence community.

While Trump claimed yesterday that his performance at Monday's meeting had been a hit within the intelligence community, his apparent willingness to accept Putin's denial that Russia sought to meddle in the 2016 race prompted a rebuke from director of national intelligence Dan

Coats.

"We have been clear in our assessments of Russian meddling in the 2016 election and their ongoing, pervasive efforts to undermine our democracy, and we will continue to provide unvarnished and objective intelligence in support of our national security," Coats wrote in a statement.

Perhaps further evidence that Trump's press conference performance was poorly received came Tuesday, when the president took the rare step -- for him -- of admitting a mistake when he told reporters that he had misspoken at Monday's event. When he said, "I don't see any reason why it would be" Russia, Trump explained, he had meant to say "wouldn't," as in "I don't see any reason why it wouldn't be Russia."

Still, Trump has remained insistent that his Monday meeting with Putin was a success, declaring that the US-Russia relationship has improved and will continue to do so.

"While the Nato meeting in Brussels was an acknowledged triumph, with billions of dollars more being put up by member countries at a faster pace, the meeting with Russia may prove to be, in the long run, an even greater success. Many positive things will come out of that meeting," he wrote on Twitter across a pair of posts. "Russia has agreed to help with North Korea, where relationships with us are very good and the process is moving along. There is no rush, the sanctions remain! Big benefits and exciting future for North Korea at end of process!"