

FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

PM calls for will of the rich nations

UNB, MUNICH

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has underscored the “will” of the richer segments of societies across the world to act against climate change as there are science, technology, innovation and finance to address the problem.

“Let me also say we’ve enormous amount of science, technology, innovation, finance to address climate change. We only need the ‘will’ of the richer segments of societies - everywhere - to act ambitiously against climate change. We need to ‘transform’ our lifestyles, attitudes, systems, economies,” she said on Saturday.

The PM was delivering her speech at a panel discussion on “Climate Change as a Security Threat” at the Conference Hall of the Bayerischer Hof.

Climate change has become a real threat to human being with an unabated rise in global temperature, she said

About Bangladesh, Hasina said increasing cyclone, storm, and monsoon flooding challenge livelihood of its people.

“Our Bay of Bengal is increasingly getting acidic. Twenty percent of our people are living along the coast and one-third of Bangladesh’s population eventually risks displacement with rising sea level although we have little contribution to global warming,”

Hasina said flooding erodes river banks during every monsoon while numerous families overnight become homeless and helpless. “We lose thousands of acres of precious farmland. And, let’s note that our mighty rivers carry nearly one fourth of entire load of sediment carried by all the major river systems in the world every year.”

She mentioned that the erratic pattern and intensity of rainfall and

rising heat made farming difficult for Bangladesh’s people. There were also reports of growing water stress during dry season.

The PM said changing climate was taking its toll.

“Diseases like malaria, which we successfully eradicated risks a comeback,” she said, adding that temperature variation was challenging breeding of Bangladesh’s national fish -- Hilsa.

The PM said despite the fact and also findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, a lot of people, including those who are conscious of climate change, were yet to understand the climate displacement issue.

She said South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific experienced the most displacement in such contexts. All together, these regions at present have 8.6 million displaced people due to sudden disasters.

Hasina mentioned that an estimated 46 million people were displaced in South Asia alone by sudden disasters during 2008 to 2013, though the actual number of people moving internally and across borders in South Asia was not known.

“It’s anticipated that population movements in the context of disasters and climate change in South Asia, South East Asia and in the Indian Ocean rim are likely to increase over the next decades,” she apprehended.

Hasina said the challenges ahead are likely to be enormous, as a recent World Bank report titled “groundswell-preparing for internal climate migration” projects that without concrete climate and development actions, in South Asia alone, more than 40 million people could be forced to move within their countries to escape the slow-onset impacts of climate

change.

“Bangladesh has been in the forefront in addressing coping mechanisms, particularly in the agricultural sector. We’ve invented flood-resistant, salt-tolerant and drought-tolerant rice varieties.”

In reply to a query, the PM said Bangladesh military has been engaging with a lot of development activities in the country. It is leading the disaster response in Bangladesh. They can also be engaged in early warning mechanisms.

Hasina said most of the UN members are discussing the climate change issue in the multilateral forums. “We need to keep the discussions and engagements up.”

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable front-line countries, she said, adding that the government in Bangladesh has included climate actions and disaster risks reduction in its national plan.

“We’ve invested over 1 percent of our GDP to address climate change impacts. Moreover, \$450 million has been allocated from our own sources for adoption and mitigation purposes.”

In 2012, Hasina recalled that she pledged in New York that Bangladesh would pursue a low-carbon development pathway as its commitment to “collective good” of tackling climate change.

She said Bangladesh has installed around six million solar home systems, provided two million Improved Cook Stoves among the poorest. In spite of limitations, the country allocated \$385 million to the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund for adaptation and mitigation.

Director of Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Hans Joachim chaired the discussion.

BANK LOANS

Govt firm on bringing down interest rates

Says finance minister

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal yesterday told parliament that the government was determined to bring down the interest rates on bank loans to a single digit.

“Twenty one banks have already decided to lower interest rates to a single digit after meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in 2018,” Kamal said in response to a call-attention notice raised by main opposition Jatiya Party MP Moshir Rahman Ranga.

In his call-attention notice, Ranga said although 11 banks are claiming that they have lowered the lending rates to a single digit, businessmen were claiming that in reality they were still paying 11 to 13 percent interest on their bank loans.

The finance minister further responded by saying he had already started discussions with owners and managing committees of different public and private banks about lowering the rates.

“During the discussions, everyone expressed their positive attitude to lower the bank loan interest rate to single digit. I hope we will be able to find solutions that suit all parties within a short time,” Kamal added.

In his speech, the minister said high rates in bank loans and loan default culture has been creating a negative impact for long on the country’s economy.

“I want to assure you in parliament that we will find solutions to those issues.”

Kamal also assured the MPs that the loan default “culture” would not exist in the country in the future and that the amount of defaulted loan would not increase.

Democracy

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secured election victories and whose defeat is unlikely in the foreseeable future.”

He said the DPS has not evolved recently in the country. It dates back to 1991 and the ruling party’s monopoly on state agencies, constitutional bodies and vast sections of civil society associations led to “the evolution of de facto party-state”.

Mirza further said the caretaker government system enabled people to witness “one-day competitive democracy” through polls. But the political elites didn’t like it because of “electoral uncertainty”.

“Existence of electoral uncertainty is a serious irritating factor for the ruling political elites -- got rid of it at the end of 2013 and then perfected the art of managing/neutralising electoral uncertainty at the end of 2018.”

On the country’s development, he said Bangladeshi politicians are keen on the Malaysian development model -- a combination of patrimonial and centralised leadership and democracy -- that leaves loopholes for corruption.

“The state tends to be captured by the capitalist class where they protect the rights of a few through collective lobbying,” he said, citing that Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh and loan defaulters were influencing policy-making.

But Naomi Hossain, research fellow of Power and Popular Politics Cluster at the University of Sussex in the UK, said the business class is not dominating Bangladesh politics.

MM Akash, professor of Economics at Dhaka University, said the ruling class, comprising politicians, businesspeople and bureaucrats, remains unchanged no matter which party holds power.

“The current government of Bangladesh is backed by businesspeople and bureaucracy. If the DCs (deputy commissioners) and the SPs (superintendents of police) had not helped the Awami League, it would not have been able to win the election.”

He said it is a matter of concern that the country’s bureaucracy has become very powerful.

Ahmad Ahsan, director of the Policy Research Institute, said many East Asian countries, including China, have one-party political system but they have a competitive framework.

Stressing the need for democracy for development, Kazi Maruful Islam, professor of Development Studies at the DU, said “Bangladesh had democracy deficit in the past. Now, it has evolved into a defective democracy.”

“It is very tough to ensure development and make the country corruption-free with such democracy.”

Raunaq Jahan, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, said there is a flaw in the country’s democratic system.

Cop among 2 sentenced

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The court also fined them Tk one lakh each, said Taufiq Ahmed, Court Inspector of Kishoreganj.

Those who were given jail-terms are- Mustafa Mir Ranana, 55, Md Dilbor Hossain, 42, Abul Hossain, 58, Joynal Abedin, 49, and Kabir Hossain Shanto, 45. Rana is the owner of a hotel while the others were his employees, hailing from Narayanganj and Narsingdi.

The court fined each of them Tk 50,000, in default of which they will have to suffer another six months in jail. Dilbor, Mustafa and Joynal were present during the verdict delivery while the others were tried in absentia.

The punishments were handed yesterday afternoon by Kiron Shankar Halder, the judge of Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal-1 in Kishoreganj.

Advocate MA Afzal, the public prosecutor of the court, said the death convicts -- Moniruzzaman, then posted at Kishoreganj Police Lines, and his friend Shamim -- had gotten acquainted with two college girls Afroza Urmi and Afroza Sumi through mobile phone conversations.

The two men took the girls to Dhaka on July 17 in 2008. They boarded two rooms in the hotel at Karwan Bazar area, where they strangled the girls after rape on the same day and left the scene. The bodies were left in the hotel rooms, said Afzal.

The hotel authorities did not inform police and dumped the bodies in Hatirjheel and Tejgoan areas to hide the murders, he said.

Police recovered the bodies the following day and two separate unnatural death cases were lodged

with Ramna and Tejgoan Police Stations.

Sumi’s father Abu Bakar Siddique lodged a complaint with Kishoreganj Sadar Police Station regarding the missing girls.

On information from various sources, the family members identified the bodies. The missing-person complaint was then turned into a murder case.

As there was no significant lead in the case, it was handed over to the Detective Branch (DB) of Police in Kishoreganj. The then officer-in-charge of Kishoreganj DB Md Amjad Hossain was made the investigation officer (IO) of the case.

Through mobile call lists Moniruzzaman and Shamim were first arrested and following their confessional statements, police later arrested the hotel employees, said the IO.

Police pressed a charge sheet accusing eight persons in 2010. Of the accused Babul Mia died during trial, the IO informed.

Expressing his satisfaction over the verdict, the official also thanked the then Inspector General of Police (IGP) Nur Mohammad for rendering all-round support in the investigation.

Give plastic

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The books being donated for the initiative are the so-called “pending” or “suspended” books (“libri sospesi” in Italian), a concept introduced by Gentile a few years ago that earned him headlines in national media.

The term derives from the “suspended coffee” Neapolitan tradition, born during World War II, of purchasing two coffees: one for yourself and the second one as an anonymous gift for the next customer in need who walks into the bar. Similarly, Ex Libris customers can buy one book and leave the second one “suspended” for whom-ever needs it.

The idea for the “plastic/metal for books” recycling initiative came to Gentile while he was looking at a huge pile of metallic waste left abandoned on a field.

“It was worth at least 300-400 euros (\$338-\$451), enough to pay for a middle school kid’s book allowance for a year,” he said. “So, I talked to a local school, and they organised an aluminum collection. Results were extraordinary, about 2 quintals (\$564) in two days.”

With the money he got from the recycling centre, Gentile bought books for a whole class.

“So, I thought: Why not (give) away books to kids who bring me plastic bottles and cans?” he said.

His initiative, which involves individuals and schools, has already reached northern Italy, with children from Bordighera, in the Liguria region, sending him 23 bottles and 23 cans to recycle.

“Yesterday alone, I donated 60 suspended books,” Gentile said. “Imagine if this becomes a small game: Every child in the world swaps a plastic bottle and a can for books. I know it’s just a dream, but why not do it?”

Indian priest gets 20 years in jail for raping minor

AFP, Kochi

An Indian court has convicted a senior Catholic priest of raping a minor and sentenced him to 20 years in jail, the latest sexual assault scandal involving the Church in southern Kerala state.

Robin Vadakkumchery was found guilty on Saturday of raping a 16-year-old schoolgirl, with the crime only coming to light after the victim gave birth to a baby in a surprise delivery in February 2017.

Citing a lack of evidence, the court acquitted four nuns, a priest and an orphanage employee who had been accused of trying to cover up the crime and shield the influential Vadakkumchery.

After a child rights charity reported the secret delivery to the police, leading to the priest’s arrest at Kochi airport as he attempted to board a plane to Canada, many of the main witnesses in the case turned hostile.

“Almost all the independent witnesses proved non-cooperative, making it difficult for us to provide substantive evidence against all that the defence threw at us,” Inspector Sunil Kumar, who investigated the case, told AFP.

Even the father of the victim testified that he, and not the priest, had raped the girl, while his daughter told the court that the relationship was consensual and said she had been

an adult at the time.

Sex -- whether consensual or otherwise -- with a person below 18 years of age is considered rape under India’s stringent child protection laws.

Only the doctor’s official record of when the baby was born could prove that the girl had been a minor at the time of delivery, said Kumar.

“Luckily for us, the doctor who delivered the baby... stood his ground, so we could prove without doubt that the victim was a minor at the time,” he said.

The victim had been a student at a Church-run school which came under Vadakkumchery’s jurisdiction.

Saturday’s verdict followed a raft of allegations against senior Church figures in Kerala, including a bishop, Franco Mulakkal, who is accused of raping a nun 13 times over two years. He denies the charges.

Sister Lucy Kalappurakkal, who has faced disciplinary action for supporting protests demanding action against Mulakkal, lauded the verdict.

“It will work as a deterrent against such offenders. Rather than covering up such heinous crimes, (the) Church should expose such elements,” she told the Hindustan Times.

Sexual abuse by clergy and the failure of officials to take action has mired the Catholic Church in scandal across the world in recent years.

3 suspected

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Kushtia General Hospital morgue.

However, Nazmul’s family members said he was picked up on Saturday. Asked, the law enforcers denied the allegation.

Police claimed to have recovered 600 yaba pills, a pistol and two bullets from the spot.

Meanwhile, another suspected drug peddler was killed in a “gunfight” with police in Cumilla’s Chandina upazila around 3:30am.

The dead -- Mangal Miah, 55 -- was accused in 21 cases, claimed Abul Faisal, officer-in-charge of Chandina Police Station.

Acting on a tip-off, police raided the upazila’s Pirerchar area to recover drug. Sensing their presence, Mangal and his cohorts opened fire, forcing them to retaliate.

At one point, Mangal sustained bullet injuries. He died on the way to a hospital, the OC claimed.

Police claimed to have recovered a gun, two round bullets, 500 yaba tablets and 50 bottles of Phensidyl from the spot.

In Munshiganj’s Sadar upazila, an alleged robber was killed in a “gunfight” with police early yesterday.

The dead -- Humayun Bepari, 30 -- was accused in six cases, claimed Alamgir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Munshiganj Sadar Police Station.

The “gunfight” took place when a police went in Taleshar Bridge area of the upazila to recover fire-arms, the law enforcers claimed.

Sensing their presence, Humayun and his cohorts opened fire, forcing them to retaliate, police officials claimed.

At one point of the “gunfight”, he was caught in the line of fire and sustained bullet wounds. Later, doctors declared him dead at Munshiganj General Hospital.

Two police officials -- SI Debashish Kundu and ASI Minhaj - also sustained bullet injuries in the “gunfight”.

They were admitted to a local hospital.

Police claimed to have recovered two pistols, three bullets and sharp weapons from the scene.

[Our Kushtia, Cumilla and Munshiganj correspondents contributed to this report.]

RMG worker

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Rakib was made prime accused in the case but the victim’s brother said Rakib did not rape the girl. “Rakib was made a suspect as he took the girl to the spot on Thursday,” he said.

The girl was sent to Shaheed Suhrawardy Medical College and Hospital for medical tests.

Fire raging

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Delhi burned effigies of Pakistani and Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) leaders while attacks on Kashmiris were reported in different cities.

23 MEN DETAINED

Indian forces have detained 23 men suspected of links to the Pakistan-based militant group that masterminded the bombing, a top police official said yesterday.

The 23 men included members and sympathisers of Jaish-e-Mohammad.

Representatives of India’s National Investigating Agency (NIA) questioned the suspects about the bombing, two security officials said.

“They are trying to reach out to the top commanders of Jaish-e-Mohammad, including its Kashmir Chief,” one of the sources said.

Mohammed Umair, the commander of the Jaish in Kashmir who is believed to have plotted the attack, is suspected to be hiding in the region where the attacks took place, the officials said.

They also said Umair had “radicalised and motivated” the Kashmiri school dropout who rammed a car laden with explosives into the convoy, reported Reuters.

Umair is thought to have entered Indian Kashmir from Pakistan in September to head the Jaish in the region. Security forces suspect he is in hiding in southern Kashmir, according to the officials, who could not be named as a matter of policy.

Indian officials say Umair is a nephew of the chief of the Jaish, Masood Azhar, who is believed to be in Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Indian authorities withdrew police protection for five separatist leaders in Kashmir, reported our New Delhi correspondent.

Indian officials said police protection had been withdrawn for Muslim cleric Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and four other leaders.

“We have decided to withdraw the security of separatist leaders in the wake of the attack on security forces,” home affairs ministry spokesman A Bharat Bhushan Babu said.

Babu said the decision followed a call by the government for a review of security for those “taking money from Pakistan.”

SURGICAL STRIKES

Perhaps fearing surgical strikes, Pakistan has relocated terrorists at launch pads along the Line of Control to army camps that are usually in close proximity to such facilities.

With the Modi government stating that armed forces have been authorised to respond to the JeM attack on the CRPF convoy, the Pakistan army seems to have taken some pre-emptive measures. Though there is tension on both sides, there is no artillery movement or any other deployment along the frontiers, top intelligence sources in Kashmir told TOI.

“As of today, we don’t have any

targets to strike at across the Line of Control, where terrorists used to be ready to be launched to infiltrate into this side,” sources said.

This could leave the Indian Army with the option of targeting Pakistan army installations and could mean possible escalation of the conflict, a senior official said.

Intelligence sources said the assessment that Pakistan was anticipating action -- perhaps in response to terror attacks -- was made by the fact that Pakistan did not vacate its winter posts along the frontiers this year.

“At least 50 to 60 winter posts which would be vacated every year remain occupied as of now. With additional reinforcements from the terror launch pads, we don’t know what the strength of their posts is as of today,” sources said.

Pakistan’s Foreign Secretary Tehmina Janjua yesterday apprised envoys from Africa and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) member states on Islamabad’s position on the recent deadly attack targeting Indian security forces in Kashmir, and New Delhi’s “knee-jerk” reaction blaming Pakistan and threatening it, reported Dawn online.

Janjua “recalled a familiar pattern of India blaming Pakistan instantly after such incidents without any investigation”, the Foreign Office spokesman Dr Mohammad Faisal tweeted.

Unique effort

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Mother Language Day was the initiative of Bangladesh. It was approved at the 1999 UNESCO General Conference and has been observed throughout the world since 2000.

According to the UNESCO, a language disappears from the world taking with it an entire cultural and intellectual heritage every two weeks.

Scrap Dec 30

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are Golam Mohammad Siraj from Bogura-5, AUM Khalilur Rahman from Joypurhat-2, Md Mahmudul Haque Rubel from Sherpur-3, Md Abu Ahmad Akando Walid from Mymensingh-4 and Abul Hossain Khan from Barishal-6.

The court is yet to set any date for hearing the petitions.

The BNP and the Jatiya Oikyafront, an alliance of BNP and some other parties, rejected the polls results, alleging huge irregularities in the election.

The Awami League-led grand alliance secured 289 seats, while the Oikyafront got only eight seats.

The Oikyafront MPs-elect are yet to take oath in parliament.

The alliance will hold a mass hearing on February 24 to present the “picture of vote rigging” of the recently concluded parliamentary election.