

WORLD MUSLIM UNITY

PM for pivotal role of OIC

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday stressed the need for a pivotal role of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in forging unity of the Muslim community and stopping fratricidal conflicts among them.

"The OIC would have to play a stronger role in stopping fratricidal conflicts among the Muslim communities," she said when visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif paid a courtesy call on her at the Prime Minister's Office.

After the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim briefed journalists.

Referring to the conflicts among the Muslims, Sheikh Hasina said, "The Muslims are shedding their blood because of their divisions and the third parties or countries are enjoining the benefits of it."

Hasina opined that the conflicts among the Muslim countries could be resolved bilaterally or multilaterally.

Mentioning that religious harmony prevails in Bangladesh, she informed

the Iranian minister that she had adopted two Shia girls, who were affected by the devastating Nimtali fire.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who arrived in Dhaka on Tuesday night to attend the two-day-long third IORA Blue Economy Ministerial Conference that started yesterday, conveyed the greetings of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani to Hasina.

Describing the progress of Bangladesh as exemplary achievement, Javad said, "I'm highly impressed with the socio-economic development of Bangladesh and it has only been possible for your [Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's] personal leadership."

The visiting Iranian minister also appreciated the role of the Prime Minister in the OIC forum and expressed satisfaction over the existing relations between the two countries.

PM's Principal Secretary Md Nojibur Rahman and Iranian Ambassador in Dhaka Mohammad Reza Nafar were present on the occasion.



Visiting Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office yesterday.

PHOTO: PID

Tussle in JP over post of opposition leader

RASHIDUL HASAN

Jatiya Party Chairman GM Quader is at loggerheads with Senior Co-chairperson Raushan Ershad over becoming the leader of the opposition in parliament.

Raushan yesterday sent a letter to Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, mentioning that Quader was not the party's chairman, but the acting chairman.

The move came a day after Quader sent another letter to the Speaker, requesting her to appoint him as the leader of the opposition.

Raushan, wife of late JP chairman HM Ershad, said Quader's letter was "not official" as the issue was not discussed in the JP parliamentary party. She requested the Speaker not to accept Quader's letter, said party sources.

JP lawmaker Mujibul Haque Chunnu submitted the letter to the Speaker's office on behalf of Raushan.

Sources said a group of JP presidium members and lawmakers met Raushan, also the deputy leader of the opposition, at her Gulshan home in the capital yesterday.

Raushan told the meeting that she would hold a press conference at her home this morning to clarify her stance on Quader's letter, said Chunnu, who was present at the meeting.

Party insiders said the dispute over the post of the leader of the opposition caused unease among the supporters of Raushan and Quader.

On Tuesday, five JP lawmakers,

led by Kazi Feroz Rashid, submitted Quader's letter to the Speaker's office.

The letter claimed that 15 out of the 21 JP lawmakers backed Quader for the post of leader of the opposition.

Speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Chunnu said, "What GM Quader did was not right at all. He cannot send a letter to the Speaker for becoming the opposition leader as the party's parliamentary party is the only authority to make a decision in this regard."

He claimed that Raushan has the jurisdiction to convene a meeting of the parliamentary party and to take a decision on picking the leader of the opposition.

Wishing anonymity, another JP lawmaker said, "We all know that the parliamentary party will meet before the Jatiya Sangsad goes into session on September 8 and the issue will be discussed in that forum. I don't understand why he [Quader] made such a move suddenly."

The post of the opposition leader fell vacant following the death of Ershad on July 14.

Four days later, JP Secretary General Moshiur Rahman Ranga announced that Quader was made the chairman of the party.

Aggrieved by the move, some senior JP leaders, including Raushan, on July 23 questioned the appointment, saying that it was not made following discussions at the proper forum of the party. Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach Quader over phone for comments.

Poor data collection

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to create an automatic and flawless database and to get advanced information about the "structural health" of bridges and culverts so that their lifespan can be extended by taking timely measures.

Under the project, manuals on using BMS and creating the database were also prepared. Besides, 333 people including 72 master trainers were given necessary training.

Currently, RHD has Bridge Maintenance Management System (BMMS), which was last updated in 2013.

POOR SHOW OF DATA COLLECTION

After the collapse of two Bailey bridges in May, The Daily Star contacted the Bridge Management Wing of RHD to know about the latest condition of the Bailey bridges. But the wing could not give any recent data on how many of them are vulnerable.

Officials said they started collecting data in January to learn about the condition of the bridges and hoped to get information on major bridges within a year.

But over the last eight months, data collection has been going on at a frustratingly slow pace, which was reflected in Rowshan Ara's August 5 letter.

On several occasions, the RHD chief engineer asked field officials to give inputs in the software but they did not comply, the letter said, adding, "As a result, questions shroud over the possible outcome of the TK 31 crore project."

The letter also mentioned Jica's July 10 reminder and said the delay in implementation will also "tarnish the image" of the department before the road transport and bridges ministry and Jica.

It also said that despite repeated directives, the progress in data collection and entry was not satisfactory, and it may cause difficulties in "budgetary allocation for bridges and culverts in the current

and subsequent fiscal years."

Hafizur Rahman, a superintendent engineer (planning and data circle) of RHD, who oversees the whole process of data collection and software management, on August 21 said field officials could not provide information due to their pressing engagements between January and June.

Sources said officials are usually busy with projects, their approvals and budgets, and other desk jobs in the first half of a fiscal year and in the second half, they are usually working more on the field repairing and building roads and bridges.

"Now we hope to make significant progress [in collecting information] in the next two to three months," he said, adding that they would first collect information about bridges and then culverts.

Asked about the risk of not having updated data, Hafizur said, "Our field-level officials are regularly monitoring those structures."

Additional Chief Engineer Rowshan Ara last month said, "We are getting response but not at the expected level. So, we issued the letter."

She said the absence of a dedicated workforce for inspection and lack of some special equipment to assess large bridges are causing the delay.

"The sooner we get the information, the better it will be, because the software will monitor the condition of the bridges properly."

Cop held

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was a constable-cum-driver at the police station.

Mamun was not on duty when the incident happened and Banglalink police would not take responsibilities for his actions, he said.

No case was filed in this connection as of 9:30pm.

It is difficult to rely on the results of local laboratories because many of their machines are obsolete and they follow invalid methods. Reagents [substance for use in the analysis] are also adulterated. Hence the variation in results. The credibility of the country's labs is at stake," Mahfuzur Rahman, former chairman of BFSA, told The Daily Star.

'SOMETHING IS WRONG'

The accuracy of any lab tests depends on three 'Ms' -- machine, method and the man behind the machine -- and none of these are often right in Bangladesh, experts say.

"If the same sample is tested in two different labs and they come up with totally opposite results, it means there is something wrong," said Barun Kanti Saha, chief scientific officer and director at the BCSIR.

Latif Bari, head of Food Analysis and Research Laboratory at Dhaka University's Centre for Advanced Research in Sciences, agrees.

He said that the temperature during preservation and the preservatives used could also contribute to varying results.

"There might also be human errors, because the person behind the machine is very important," he noted.

Also, government laboratories rarely calibrate their machines, another likely factor behind the massive differences, he said.

Calibration is a set of operations to ensure that the readings from the instrument are accurate and consistent with other measurements. It increases the reliability of the instrument, which is highly important in laboratory best

practices.

The machine with which the BCSIR tested lead in the milk samples was installed in 2007-08. The IPH machines, both for testing lead as well as antibiotics, were set up between 2011 and 2013. The lead testing machine at the BAEC was installed in 2010-11, sources said.

All three labs conducted their last calibration late last year, officials said, requesting anonymity.

The IPH and BAEC declined to comment on their findings.

NO ACCREDITATION

There are 54 registered labs in the country. But except for the BAEC, no other lab has certification from the Bangladesh Accreditation Board (BAB) for testing heavy metal in milk.

Sources in the BAB, formed in

2010, said only the BAEC has the accreditation to perform tests to determine the presence of heavy metals such as lead, chromium and cadmium in milk.

"Accreditation is voluntary. It cannot be imposed," said Nasirul Islam, deputy director at the Board.

Accreditation confirms whether a particular lab has the capacity to run tests in line with international standards, he added.

The Bangladesh Standard Testing Institution (BSTI) is the only designated government standard testing watchdog in the country. This means it should have all the means to test and confirm if a food item is safe.

Contacted, its Deputy Director for certification Reazul Haque said, "We have the accreditation to test 411 items. Heavy metal is not part of our safety parameters, so we do not run this test. Once we include heavy metals, antibiotics and pesticides in the parameters, we will bring in the necessary equipment to run these tests."

But he added that having no accreditation does not necessarily mean that the test result is unreliable.

According to Mahfuzur, the former BFSA chairman, accreditation is essential because it is an assurance of quality control.

"In fact, it is not the labs that are accredited; the parameters are. Without accredited tests, we cannot say for sure that the test result is accurate," he said.

Accreditation is important because it means the test is globally accepted, said Barun Kanti, the chief scientific officer at the BCSIR.

1 in 3 young people bullied online

Says UN report

UNB, Dhaka

Around one-in-three young people across 30 countries, including Bangladesh, India and Myanmar, say they have been bullied online, while one-in-five report that they have skipped school because of it.

These are some of the key findings in a new poll released yesterday by the UN Children's Fund and the UN Special Representative on Violence against Children.

More than 170,000 young people between the age of 13 and 24 years participated in the poll through the youth engagement tool U-Report.

The participants are from Albania, Bangladesh, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador, France, Gambia, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Jamaica, Kosovo, Liberia, Malawi, Malaysia, Mali, Moldova, Montenegro, Myanmar, Nigeria, Romania, Sierra Leone, Trinidad & Tobago, Ukraine, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe.

Speaking out anonymously through U-Report, almost three-quarters of young people said social networks, including Facebook, Instagram, and

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Tigers seek new beginning

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Stadium today. The match will start at 10:00am.

It is a different format but a clinical approach from the Tigers against the newest members of the elite Test club will create some positive vibes after bleak recent record and some controversy surrounding ODI skipper Mashrafe Bin Mortaza.

It will be Bangladesh's 115th Test match while Afghanistan will play just their third - a gulf sufficient enough to explain why the hosts will be favourites when they return to Test cricket after five months.

Enjoying the home advantage will also help the Tigers' cause. Bangladesh will definitely want to forget their last Test series in New Zealand in February-March and take inspiration from their last home series, which they won 2-0 against West Indies in November last year.

Afghanistan have gained credibility in limited-overs cricket in rapid fashion, but five-day cricket is a new proposition for the war-torn country. Still, their versatile spin attack can pose a threat. Bangladesh are expected to play with a spin-heavy attack -- their proven recipe for home

success -- and the visitors will also rely on their spin attack. With both sides strong in the spin department, Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan made it clear yesterday that batting would separate the teams.

The Chattogram pitch is expected to provide a lot of assistance to spinners but it will be important for Bangladesh's batsmen to tackle the Afghan spinners in the absence of experienced opener Tamim Iqbal to start the new season on a positive note, while for Afghanistan they will surely put up a tough fight to make their presence felt in the Test arena.