

Let Dhaka know before imposing any export ban

Hasina tells Indian government

STAR REPORT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged the Indian government to inform Bangladesh before slapping any ban on exports of products such as onion so that it can import those from alternative markets.

"Suddenly, you [India] have stopped exporting onion. We could have arranged it from other countries if we had been informed about it beforehand. It'll be better if you inform us beforehand of any such decision in the future," she said in Hindi in a humorous tone, reports UNB.

Hasina quipped that she asked her chef not to use onion while cooking.

She was addressing the inaugural session of India-Bangladesh Business Forum, held at the Hotel ITC Maurya in New Delhi.

Hasina's ready wit and humour over India's ban on onion export became a hit with the Twitterati across India

with many coming out in her support, adds our New Delhi correspondent.

On September 29, the Indian government banned exports of onion with immediate effect till further orders for what it says improving domestic availability.

Meanwhile, a consignment of around 1,500 tonnes of onion loaded in 60 trucks started entering Bangladesh yesterday. The consignment is coming under LCs opened before the enforcement of the ban.

Indian Minister for Commerce and Industry and Railways Piyush Goyal, Bangladesh Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, FBCCI President Sheikh Fazle Rahim, President of Confederation of India Industries and also vice chairman of Toyota Kirloskar Motor Private Limited Vikram S Kirloskar, FICCI President and also Managing Director of HSIL Limited Sandip Somany also spoke on the occasion.

Focus on connectivity

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The final NRC, published on August 31, excluded names of about 19.07 lakh applicants. That day, Indian media reported that most of them were Bangla-speaking people.

Kumar's comment came a day after Hasina at a reception at the Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi said she was happy with Modi's assurance.

"Obosshoyi [of course]. I don't see any problem. I had talks with Prime Minister Modi. Everything is okay," she said while replying to questions on the NRC issue, which is likely to come up for discussion at her meeting with Modi today.

Hasina reached the Indian capital on Thursday on a four-day visit to attend the India Economic Summit of the World Economic Forum.

On October 1, Modi's close aide and Indian Home Minister Amit Shah had made it clear that the NRC programme would be extended to entire India and there would be no space for any illegal immigrants in the country.

Asked about a recent comment of Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen that the issue of border killings would be raised at today's talks, Kumar said, "It was important to understand that the number of such killings has come down drastically due to concerted efforts by the two sides and by the border guard forces of the two countries and under the leadership of the two prime ministers."

Replying to a question on the Teesta water-sharing agreement, the Indian official said the Bangladesh government was aware of India's stance on the matter.

He said apart from the Teesta, there were several other trans-border common rivers and a secretary-level meeting of the Joint River Commission would be held soon to discuss the water-sharing issues.

In 2011, Bangladesh and India failed to sign the Teesta water-sharing agreement due to last-minute opposition from West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee during the

then Indian PM Manmohan Singh's visit to Dhaka.

Even today, the issue still remains unresolved. As a result, farmers in Bangladesh's northern region depend heavily on underground water for irrigation.

Meanwhile, Indian officials said Bangladesh would supply liquefied petroleum gas to India under an agreement to be signed by the two sides following the Hasina-Modi meet.

This will be the first time LPG from Bangladesh will come to India, India's Oil and Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said on Thursday.

Another MoU is likely to be inked for a new waterway to connect the Meghna river in Bangladesh with the Gomati river in Tripura, said Tripura Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb.

At a function in Agartala on Thursday, Deb said the proposed MoU would facilitate movement of goods from Ashuganj port to Sonamura in Sipahijala district of Tripura.

The movement of vessels on the Gomati for providing waterway connectivity to Tripura would be possible only after the inclusion of the stretch between Sonamura and Daudkandi in Cumilla as part of the Indo-Bangladesh Protocol Route, Deb said.

In June, the chief minister had sought the permission of the shipping ministry through an official letter for construction of a temporary jetty on the Gomati river.

At present, ships and steamers have to take a circuitous route from Haldia in West Bengal to Daudkandi in Cumilla.

If Sonamura and Daudkandi can be linked through waterway, Tripura and north eastern India will get the maximum benefit because of the access it could open up to Chittagong port, Deb said.

Chittagong port is just 70kms from Sabroom, a town in Tripura near the border with Bangladesh.

According to sources, both sides are also in talks for agreements for a special economic zone and a skill development centre to be set up in Khulna.

Zeesan to be brought back

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enforcement agencies were preparing the necessary documents, which would be sent to Dubai for his extradition.

Zeesan had an Indian passport in his possession, in which he was named Ali Akbar Choudhury, a police official said.

He was on the home ministry's list of 23 top criminals. The list was published a decade ago. He was known as a notorious criminal in Gulshan, Banani, Badda, Motijheel and some other areas of the capital.

Transnational police organisation Interpol had issued a "Red Notice" for Zeesan. The Interpol website mentions that he faces murder charges and is accused of possessing explosives in

multiple cases.

He came into public focus after he allegedly gunned down two officers of the Detective Branch of police at a hotel in the capital's Malibagh in 2003.

He went into hiding afterwards. He was believed to have left the country after law enforcers launched a crackdown in 2005.

Zeesan went to India and changed his name to Ali Akbar Choudhury, officials said.

His name resurfaced during the ongoing drive against illegal casinos and arrest of Jubo League leader Khaled Mahmud Bhuiyan and GK Shamim, who is known as a leader of Jubo League. Officials believe Zeesan was in close contact with them.

Hunt on for 33 Huji operatives

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met Mollah Omar and Osama Bin Laden, top leaders of al-Qaeda.

Atikullah, who is from Feni, came back to Bangladesh in 1998 and started working in different Qawmi madrasas to spread the network of Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islam (Huji) in the country, an officer said.

In early 2000, he formed an NGO named Al Ansar Welfare Foundation.

Its operation stopped after 2005 when Huji leaders went into hiding amid a crackdown by the law enforcers, the officer said, requesting anonymity.

Atikullah fled to Dubai in 2006, he said, adding that his wife and children also went there a year later.

They had been living in Dubai until Atikullah came back to Bangladesh in

After he came back and started contacting the others suspects, a Malaysia-based multilevel marketing company promised to provide funds for the outfit's activities, they added.

The Malaysian company also made commitments to fund legal battles for the jailed Huji members.

The officers also said the suspects had been trying to establish a network in Rohingya camps using two NGOs as fronts.

"The funding for these NGOs were allegedly coming from Dubai and Saudi Arabia," the official added.

He, however, refused to name the NGOs before a thorough investigation into the allegations.



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses the inaugural session of the India-Bangladesh Business Forum at Hotel ITC Maurya in New Delhi yesterday.

Shun misperception to boost regional cooperation

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Placing the second principle, she said, "We must ensure that inequality across societies do not widen in times of faster growth. Creation of wealth should be inclusive and must trickle down to the bottom millions. The less developed communities or countries should not lag behind. We must deliver to the aspirations and demands of our youths. We need to hold hands of 'others' across South Asia through our knowledge, experience, expertise, investments."

About the third principle, she said mutual trust and mutual respect between all communities and countries is the key. "We need to get over misperceptions and false apprehensions."

She said Bangladesh has consistently been contributing to international peace and security in global spheres, emanating from its policy of "Friendship to all, malice to none", as laid out by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. "This approach helped us maintain good relations with all countries."

Inspired by the visionary ideas of Bangabandhu and driven by his belief in shared prosperity and responsibility, Bangladesh continues to champion regional cooperation like Bimstec, Saarc, BBIN and BCIM, the PM said.

Hasina mentioned that Bangladesh

resolved sharing of the Ganges river water with India in 1996. "We amicably delimited our maritime boundary with India and Myanmar. Bangladesh and India are now developing trans-boundary river navigation. We are buying electricity from India through inter-country grid connections."

Describing the fourth principle, the premier said, "We must manage our geo-political realities through friendship and collaboration. Let us appreciate and balance regional political realities for the interest of our peoples. We cannot trade off long-term interests for short-term gains."

Replying to a query from the moderator of the event, Hasina said Bangladesh was attaching priority to establish connectivity among the South Asia, South East Asia and others to promote trade and commerce in the region.

She said Bangabandhu had realised the importance of enhancing connectivity for regional prosperity. The PM said her government was working to restore the previous connectivity which was suspended after 1965. "We always think about it. We can make a bridge in this region and beyond."

Hasina said Bangladesh was

playing its role in establishing the Asian highway and Asian railway network.

Describing poverty as a common enemy, she said all countries in the region should work together to fight the menace.

Deputy Prime Minister of Singapore Heng Swee Keat, Managing Director of Sequoia Capital India Shailendra Singh, Executive Vice Chairperson of Apollo Hospital Enterprise Shobana Karmineni, Chairwoman of Booking.com Gillian Tans were panelists at the event.

INVEST IN BANGLADESH'

Speaking at India-Bangladesh Business Forum at New Delhi's Hotel ITC Maurya, Hasina urged the Indian businessmen to step up investment in Bangladesh's special economic zones and high-tech parks, reports BSS.

"A number of high-tech parks are also ready for technology and innovative enterprises. Bangladesh has offered three Special Economic Zones for Indian investors at Mongla, Bheramara and Mirsarai. Substantial investment from Indian investors in these three Indian Economic Zones in Bangladesh would help broaden our exportable base."

She said Bangladesh is in the process of establishing 100 special economic zones.

The PM called upon the India-Bangladesh businessmen to work for mutual benefits. "I would urge all of you to make best use of the platform and contribute to the economies of

both the countries for the greater mutual benefits of our peoples."

Speaking about Bangladesh's possibility of becoming an economic hub of the region, Hasina said the country's strategic location provides tremendous potential for being the economic hub of the region. "With India to the west, China to the north and South-East Asia to the east, Bangladesh is in the middle of a combined market of 4 billion people."

She said Bangladesh has the most liberal investment policy in South Asia that includes protection of foreign investment by law, generous tax holiday, concessionary duty on import of machinery, unrestricted exit policy, full repatriation of dividend and capital on exit.

On the rising trend of trade and investment between the two countries, the premier said the volume of bilateral trade has steadily grown over the past years. However, the balance of trade was still largely in India's favour.

Indian Industry and Railway Minister Piyush Goyal, Bangladesh Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries President Sheikh Fazle Rahim, Confederation of Indian Industry President Vikram Shreekanth Kirloskar, and Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) President Sandip Somany also spoke on the occasion.

Outrageous offer for a defaulter

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the loan sanctioning process, he said.

"A large amount of money is now stuck because of financial scams. The banking sector is going through a liquidity crisis because of the corruption," he added.

As of June, Rupali's total defaulted loans stood at Tk 4,311.11 crore, which is 17.25 percent of its outstanding loans.

TERRIBLE TRACK RECORD

It all started in 1993, when Mother Textile, a sister concern of Euroasia Mattress, took a loan of Tk 12.40 crore from Rupali to start its manufacturing plant in Gazipur.

Since then the loan amount has been topped up many times, almost always at the expense of gross violations on the part of Rupali and with hardly any repayment from the client.

For instance, Mother Textile was in the defaulted zone between 2009 and 2012 but the state-run bank concealed

the credit status of the company and showed it as a regular client in an extraordinary step to protect a delinquent borrower.

During the period, the lender showed it had received an interest payment of Tk 111.29 crore from Mother Textile, which was not true at all, according to a BB investigation in 2013.

And the lender did not keep any provisioning against the defaulted loans either -- a punishable offence.

This was preceded by disbursement of huge amounts of funds between 2009 and 2012 to the client, who was by then a full-fledged defaulter, in another breach of the Banking Companies Act 1991.

Until now, Mother Textile enjoyed at least seven rescheduling facilities, and it hardly made any payments, according to BB documents.

For instance, only Tk 48 lakh was paid this year, which is too little given

the amount it owes to Rupali.

All the while, Mother Textile's plant failed to start full-fledged production. And what the company did with such large sums remains a mystery.

Despite repeated attempts, this correspondent could not reach Sultan Ahmed, managing director of Mother Textile.

Contacted, Kazi Younus Ahmed, general manager of the company, said, "There is no scope for repaying the loan as we are yet to recoup the losses we have suffered for long."

Asked why the company failed to strengthen its financial footing during the two-year grace period it had enjoyed under its last rescheduling agreement in 2016, Younus said, "We purchased machinery worth Tk 35 crore to enhance our capacity."

The two-year grace period ended in 2018, and from this year Mother Textile was supposed to pay monthly instalment of at least Tk 5 crore, he

mentioned.

"This is not possible given our business condition. So, we have sought the fresh facility."

The company will be abolished if the fresh rescheduling facility is not granted, Younus said, adding that Mother Textile employs 2,500 people.

Contacted, Rupali Bank Managing Director Md Obayed Ullah Al Masud said he took charge of the bank recently, and that he was not yet fully informed about the client's profile.

Masud, who was previously the MD of Sonali Bank, took charge of Rupali on August 27.

"I am now analysing the company's credit history. The lender's decision depends on the central bank's instructions," he added.

BB spokesperson Md Serajul Islam said the central bank is yet to decide whether it will approve Rupali's rescheduling application for Mother Textile.

Rain brings fresh concern

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Kinkar Ghosh, an epidemiologist at Dhaka Shishu Hospital, said as the people and the authorities concerned were very alert, the number of dengue patients last month was lower than that of August.

In August, there were 52,636 dengue patients across the country, while the number was 18,250 last month.

According to