

## Bangladesh keen to engage more with Asean

Says Hasina

UNB, Dhaka

Terming Bangladesh a geographically contiguous neighbour of the Asean, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has expressed her country's keen interest in strengthening institutional engagements with the important regional organisation.

She sought a more pro-active support from the Asean to ensure an "early, safe and dignified" repatriation of the displaced Rohingyas whom Bangladesh temporarily sheltered purely on humanitarian grounds.

The PM said this in her message to President of the Philippines Rodrigo Roa Duterte on the occasion of the 50 years of diplomatic ties between Bangladesh and the Philippines, according to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

President Duterte said, "Bangladesh, having transitioned to one of the most successful economies in the world, will play a greater role in the South Asian region and beyond."

The two leaders vowed to further strengthen the shared journey of the two friendly countries in the next 50 years and beyond.

Hasina recalled with gratitude the early recognition the government of the Philippines accorded to an independent Bangladesh on February 24, 1972.

Both the leaders praised the strong, cooperative and friendly relations that have been nurtured between the two friendly countries in the last five decades, including trade, investment, education, tourism, cultural exchange and people-to-people contacts.



Three volunteers dressed up as cartoon characters entertain children at the "Child Corner" of the Amar Ekushey Boid Mela in the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday. This year's first "Children's Hour" of the fair made the children's visit more pleasant as they had a fun day out.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

### COVID RECOVERY

## WB approves \$300m loan for Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The World Bank approved a \$300m loan for Bangladesh yesterday aiming to support the country's urban local government institutions in facing the coronavirus pandemic and its future shocks.

The funding, under a programme titled The Local Government Covid-19 Response and Recovery Project, targets to benefit about 40 million urban residents, read a press release of The World Bank.

Some 329 municipalities and 10 city corporations in all eight divisions – Barishal, Chattogram, Dhaka, Khulna, Mymensingh, Rajshahi, Rangpur, and Sylhet – will have the provision to receive funds bi-annually.

Aided by the funding, the eligible urban local bodies will install community hand-washing stations and toilets; and improve sanitation in municipality-owned or operated markets, burial grounds, and public offices.

The project will help the residents have better access to municipality-operated health clinics and facilitate vaccine registrations for disadvantaged people, and conduct awareness programmes on

Covid-19 protocols, vaccines, and climate risks.

Besides, the project will support labour-intensive public works to restore the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable people, who were most affected by the Covid-19

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restrictions and lockdowns.

It will create 1.5 million days of temporary work as well as employment for 10,000 women under the public work scheme.

"The Covid-19 pandemic had hit hard

the poor people in urban areas, caused income losses and disrupted basic service delivery. But the city corporations and the municipalities can play a critical role in helping the urban poor recover from the pandemic as well as get cities prepared to handle future shocks," said Mercy Tembon, World Bank Country Director for Bangladesh and Bhutan.

"This project will help the cities and towns to build back better as they recover from the pandemic and prepare for future shocks, including climate change, disasters, and disease outbreaks," she added.

"The Covid-19 pandemic has pushed the number of urban poor up to 27 million," said Shenhua Wang, World Bank Senior Urban Development Specialist and Task Team Leader for the project.

"The project will carry out labour-intensive public works and operations and maintenance schemes that in one hand will ensure water supply and sanitation, drainage, and other critical services reach low-income areas, slums, and areas exposed to high disease outbreak and disaster risks and in other hand create jobs for the poor urban people," said Shenhua Wang.

## Battle on for Kyiv

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deploying heavy weapons in residential areas of major cities to provoke the Russian military, a claim that could fuel fears Moscow is creating pretexts for justifying civilian casualties.

Meanwhile China's foreign ministry yesterday said Putin, during a phone call, told his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping that Russia is willing to hold high level talks with Ukraine.

Putin told Xi that the United States and Nato had long ignored Russia's legitimate security concerns, repeatedly reneged on their commitments, and continued to expand military deployment eastward, challenging Russia's strategic bottom line, according to a statement on the Chinese foreign ministry website.

Russia has demanded that Ukraine to drop its ambition to join Nato.

Ukraine said 137 people, including soldiers and civilians, have been killed since Russia began its air and ground assault on Thursday.

While the United States moved to impose sanctions on Russian elites and banks, it stressed that American forces would not fight in Ukraine. Nato also said it would not send forces to Ukraine.

Among the highest-profile strategic developments on Thursday, Ukraine said Russian forces had seized the Chernobyl nuclear power plant – prompting concern from

international nuclear watchdogs. Russia said Thursday it had destroyed over 70 Ukrainian military targets, including 11 airfields.

Western intelligence confirmed Moscow had established "complete air superiority" over Ukraine.

Weeks of diplomacy failed to deter Putin, who massed over 150,000 troops on Ukraine's borders.

Western allies had initially imposed some sanctions on Russia in an effort to stop Putin from invading, then followed through on Thursday with vows to heavily punish Russia economically.

US President Joe Biden announced export controls against Russia, alongside sanctions on Russian elites he called "corrupt billionaires", and banks.

The EU also moved to impose "massive" sanctions on Russia's energy and finance sectors on Thursday. EU officials yesterday said the bloc had agreed go even further by freezing European assets linked to Putin and Lavrov personally.

There was also a raft of sanctions in the cultural and sporting worlds, with UEFA deciding that Paris will host this season's Champions League final instead of Saint Petersburg. Formula One also said it was cancelling the Russian Grand Prix while remaining World Cup skiing events were scrapped by the sport's governing body FIS.

## Nightmare on a day of joy

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"It's been a dreadful journey. We started for the Poland border around 2:00pm on Thursday [Ukraine time] and are still six kilometres off the border. We've been stuck in the same place for the last four hours. The traffic is terrible here," Mohon told this correspondent on FaceTime.

He sent two pictures showing vehicles in long queues. "It may take another four to five hours to cross the border," he said.

Mohan, who is from Jashore, was also facing trouble in using the internet. He lost the connection

several times while talking to this newspaper. At one point, he started sending voice messages.

"It's good news that we're close to the border and are apparently safe now. We've heard Poland is allowing in people with passports and vehicle documents."

Asked whether they will try to come to Bangladesh later, he said, "Honestly, [I] don't know what we will do. We need to go to Poland first. We desperately want the war to stop."

His friend Abdul Awal said, "Although we lost all our belongings, we're happy that we have survived."

Asked where will they

stay in Poland, he said, "We'll decide that once we reach there."

Asked whether any other Bangladeshis were joining them, he said, "We're yet to hear about anyone crossing the border right now. Some 10 to 12 people have contacted us over phone and said they were on their way to the border. The journey might take around 20 hours."

Although some Bangladeshis like Mohon and Awal left Kyiv, many others stayed back.

The Daily Star talked to three such Bangladeshis.

Faruk Ahmed is one of them.

The 58-year-old along

## Looking for ways to border

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get a vehicle so he could travel to a Polish border as the European country opened border for Bangladeshis.

The Bangladesh embassy in Poland contacted Rizve yesterday and he joined the embassy's WhatsApp group.

"The embassy said it would try to arrange my trip to the Polish border. Alternatively, I may also arrange it. I am looking for a better option," he said.

According to Bangladesh expatriates in Ukraine, there are some 2,000-2,500 Bangladeshis in the country and many of them were traveling to Polish and Romanian borders for safety.

Meanwhile, the Bangladesh embassy in Poland's Warsaw, which

also oversees the country's diplomatic relations with Ukraine, in a statement yesterday said Bangladeshi expatriates in Ukraine would be allowed to enter Poland without visas.

The statement said valid passport holders will be able to enter Poland. Those without a passport will be allowed to cross the border with a travel pass, which would be issued at the border. Every Bangladeshi should bring two copies of passport sized coloured photos with them.

A delegation of the embassy was rushing to Poland-Ukraine border at the soonest to assist Bangladeshis wishing to enter Poland from Ukraine, the statement added.

The embassy also advised the expatriate Bangladeshis living in

remote areas of Ukraine to monitor the situation and leave for the border, as there will be extra traffic jams along the way due to isolated bomb blasts inside Ukraine and shortage of fuel.

In another development, the Romanian government has declared that it will allow Bangladeshis, now stranded in Ukraine, in and they can stay for two days each.

"Within that period, the Bangladesh embassy in Bucharest will arrange their repatriation to Bangladesh," State Minister for Foreign Affairs Shahrar Alam said in a post on his verified Facebook page yesterday.

The Bangladesh embassy in Warsaw has advised the Bangladeshis living in South and South-western

regions of Ukraine to move towards the Romanian border.

Sultana Laila Hossain, Bangladesh ambassador to Poland, said they will arrange accommodation for the Bangladeshis on an urgent basis.

Based on the situation, the expatriates can be evacuated from Poland to Bangladesh or they can go back to Ukraine if the situation improves, she told The Daily Star.

She said she was in talks with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Ukraine so that the Bangladeshis, who were in detention centers for overstaying visas, can be repatriated by the IOM.

"We are also in contact with the Ukrainian authorities to make this happen," Sultana said.

## Cleaner held with 36 gold bars at Dhaka airport

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Customs officials detained a cleaner of the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh with 36 gold bars, weighing over 4kg, at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport yesterday morning.

Md Suruzzaman was held when he was trying to get the bars out of the airport inside his pocket, said Riazul Islam, deputy commissioner of Customs House.

The gold would be worth around Tk 3 crore, he said.

An inbound passenger might have smuggled the bars to the country and handed those over to the cleaner, customs officials said.

A case was filed against Suruzzaman with the Airport Police Station.

## Newborn rescued in Lalmonirhat identified

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

The newborn baby rescued from beside a roadside dustbin at Puran Bazar in Lalmonirhat town on Valentine's Day has been identified.

On Thursday night, police arrested three people, including the child's mother, in the town's Sahebpura area in a case filed with Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station over the incident.

Shaha Alam, officer-in-charge of Lalmonirhat Sadar Police Station, told The Daily Star that they rescued the baby girl after getting a call on 999.

The child was then treated at Lalmonirhat Sadar Hospital. When the child became stable, she was sent to Rajshahi Shishumoni Nibas, a government shelter for the lost and abandoned kids, on February 23 as per the rules, the OC said.

The arrestees confessed to their involvement during the primary interrogation, he said.

Following court orders, further steps will be taken. Many couples have applied to adopt the child, the police official added.

## Man crushed under train wheels

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

A man was crushed under the wheels of a train in Madarganj village of Thakurgaon Sadar upazila yesterday morning.

Sohrab Ali, 40, was from the same upazila.

Quoting locals, Md Akhtaruzzaman, Thakurgaon Railway Station master, said the accident took place when Sohrab was crossing Parbatipur-Panchagarh rail lines around 8:00am.

## Elderly woman found dead

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Manikganj

A 70-year-old woman was found dead in her house in Manikganj municipal area yesterday.

Amena Begum was a resident of Bandutia village. Her son Firoz, 30, has recently returned home from South Africa. He often misbehaved with her for money to buy drugs, said Firoz's cousin Shahidur Rahman Yunus.

Yunus said they noticed smoke billowing out of the house around 12:30am and called Firoz, but he did not respond. Later, they asked police who broke open the door and found the body, he added.

Abdur Rauf Sarkar, OC of Manikganj Sadar Police Station, said the cause of the death would be known after getting the autopsy report.

## Tigers roar to series victory

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impressive bowling from Taskin Ahmed and Shakib Al Hasan to bundle out Afghanistan for just 218 in 45.1 overs.

Chasing the mammoth target, Afghanistan lost three early wickets and were reeling at 34 for three after 9.1 overs. However, even though the visitors never seemed to be in total control of the game, they did raise hopes and kept themselves in the game as Najibullah Zadran and Rahmat Shah

stitched together an 89-run fourth-wicket stand.

Just when the Afghans were starting to look a bit ominous, Taskin removed both Zadran (54 off 61) and Rahmat (52 off 71) in quick succession to once again sway the momentum towards the Tigers. Taskin finished with figures of two for 31 in 10 overs, two of which were maidens.

Shakib also impressed with ball in hand, returning figures of two for 38 in 10 overs.

## Bangladesh loses 7b

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agricultural and other informal labourers work in uncovered environments and have to endure extreme heat exposure. They will quickly become dehydrated and heat stress conditions such as heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps will increase which will reduce their working hours," said Saiful.

Again, in Bangladesh humidity also contributes to heat stress.

"We have seen in several studies that under current water evaporation conditions a person cannot stay in one place for more than six hours due to heat and humidity if the temperature exceeds 35 degrees Celsius.

"During the recent heat waves, the mean temperature of our country exceeded this limit quite often. And, there is no doubt that such conditions will decrease working hours considerably," added Saiful.

Saiful suggested several adaptive measures to mitigate productivity loss.

"We need to increase

sheds and green spots fitted with drinking water sources in the urban areas where people will be able to take rest during hotter days. We need to subsidise agriculture so that farmers can employ labourers in two shifts particularly during the sowing and harvesting seasons," he said.

"We also need to bring all our citizens under universal health insurance coverage so that they can access quality healthcare anywhere anytime which will encourage them to work even under difficult conditions," Saiful added.

## Nation pays

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the carnage case filed later.

On November 5, 2013, a Dhaka court sentenced 148 BDR members and two civilians to death, 160 to life in prison, and 256 people, mostly BDR soldiers, to rigorous imprisonment.

The court acquitted 278, but the prosecutors later appealed against the acquittal of 69.