

‘Motherly affection will win people over’

PM tells Dubai Expo 2020

UNB, Dubai

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said that people will continue to support her due to her motherly affection as a leader of the country. She made the remark at a high-level power panel titled “Redefining the Future for Women” held at the Women’s Pavilion in the Dubai Expo 2020 arranged to mark International Women’s Day. Hasina said she has won the support and trust of her people and that is her main strength. “People know that if I’m there, they’ll be benefited.” But this journey was not easy, she said, adding that almost her entire family was assassinated and only she and her sister survived. The PM said she faced repeated attempts on her life along with smear campaigns. “But I didn’t care. All I thought about was continuing my work for the people.” About the Bangladesh parliament with regard to women empowerment, she said now the Speaker, the Leader of the House, the Leader of Opposition and the Deputy Leader of the House are all women. She said that when she formed the government in 1996 after the 21-year rule of military dictators, she found no women in power, adding that she took initiatives for the development and empowerment of women. She also tried to create job opportunities for them in the higher posts like the judiciary, police and other sectors. Describing the Father of the Nation as her mentor, the PM said she learned about the country and its problems from him. “I learned from my father, my mentor. I learned how to harbour compassion and love for the people and the country, as well as how to work for the poor.”



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addresses a high-level panel discussion on “Redefining the Future for Women” at the south hall of the Dubai Exhibition Centre yesterday. The event was organised marking the International Women’s Day.

PHOTO: PMO

‘Please save us’

5 Bangladeshis in a Ukraine detention camp appeal to govt

ABU SADIQ

Five Bangladeshis, reportedly detained at a camp in the Ukrainian city of Zhuravychi, said they were not being given enough food, their phones were seized and they were being tortured.

They requested the Bangladesh government to take action so that they can leave the camp.

Yesterday morning, Riyad Malik, one of the five Bangladeshis, sent The Daily Star a 40-second-long audio message using another person’s phone.

On Saturday, the Bangladeshis told this newspaper that they were being held there to be used as “human shields”.

They posted a video message the day before on social media where they sought assistance from the government. Details of their sufferings were published in The Daily Star and other prominent media.

Using someone else’s phone, Malik yesterday managed to have a brief chat with The Daily Star. In a shaky voice, he said, “I’m using another detainee’s phone. We are being tortured. There is no food and water supply at the camp. Zhuravychi is now a full-fledged war front. The detention camp is under the control of the Ukrainian army. We can hear sounds of bombardment from every direction. If the

Russian forces attack the camp or drops bombs, all 120 detainees, including the five of us, will die. Is there anyone out there who can save us? Can’t the government save us? Can’t they free us? We don’t want to die...”

Regarding communications with the Bangladesh Embassy in Poland, Malik said, “We could establish communications but we feel that they are proceeding very slowly. We are not saying they are not working. But if the embassy or the government of Bangladesh does not take rapid action, we will not survive.”

Around 60 people, including two Bangladeshis, are stranded in another detention camp in Mykolaiv. One detainee is Jahirul Islam, while another requested not to be named.

On Monday, he said, “Our situation has not changed. As the power connection has been severed, the heating system is not working and we are suffering under extreme temperatures while there is also a water and food crisis. The Russian army is now controlling the city.”

He too alleged that the civilian detainees were being used as “human shields” by the Ukrainian army.

An official at the Bangladesh Embassy in Poland said they were trying to rescue all those detained.

CO2 emissions from energy sector rises by 6 percent

AFP, Paris

Global energy-related carbon dioxide emissions rose by six percent in 2021 to a record 36.3 billion tonnes, their highest ever level, the International Energy Agency said yesterday.

“The increase in global CO2 emissions of over 2 billion tonnes was the largest in history in absolute terms, more than offsetting the previous year’s pandemic-induced decline,” it said.

It pointed to the widespread use of coal to power growth as the world economy rebounded from the Covid crisis.

The IEA said the rebound of global CO2 emissions above pre-pandemic levels was largely driven by China, where they increased by 750 million tonnes between 2019 and 2021.

Truck kills child going to school

OUR CORRESPONDENT, DINAJPUR

A schoolboy was killed after a speeding truck hit him in Dinajpur’s Chirirbandar upazila yesterday, while a woman was killed in a separate road accident in Birampur upazila on Monday.

In Chirirbandar, Ashiqur Rahman, an 11-year-old sixth grader of Z Residential Model School, was on his way to school on a bicycle when a speeding truck ran over him in Ghugratoli area, leaving him dead on the spot, said Bazlur Rashid, OC of Chirirbandar Police Station.

In Birampur, Arati, 40, of Joypurhat, was killed when a speeding truck hit a van carrying her and her husband Sunil Baske on Monday on their way back home, police said.

HC questions discriminations against women

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

With respect to women on International Women’s Day, the High Court yesterday issued a suo moto rule questioning the discrimination against women in social status, jobs and inheritance.

It asked the government to explain in four weeks why inequality between sons and daughters, males and females in respect of social status, jobs and inheritance in all religions should not be declared illegal.

Cabinet Division secretary and secretaries to the ministries of law, women and children affairs, and religious affairs have been made respondents to the rule, Assistant Attorney General Md Zakir Hossain Masud told The Daily Star.

MP ‘threatens’ female officer over late invite

OUR CORRESPONDENT, PABNA

Lawmaker Nadira Yeasmin Joly allegedly threatened to slap a district-level female officer over the phone for “inviting her late” to a Women’s Day programme at the Pabna DC office.

The allegation was made by district women’s affair officer Kaniz Airin Jahan.

After the incident went viral on social media, Nadira organised a press conference and denied the allegation saying it was made to “defame her”.

Speaking to The Daily Star, Kaniz said, “During the phone call on Monday, Nadira said, ‘You are a foul woman. You will be slapped all the way out of Pabna. You are [just] an officer, yet you are showing your command everywhere.’”

“I was in shock and expressed it at the programme but I did not make any official complaint.”

Asked, Nadira said she was not invited to the programme and had called the officer in this regard but to no avail.



Nadira Yeasmin

Ex-minister’s brother

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Mohtesam last year.

Following the arrest, police in a press release yesterday said, “Mohtesam amassed a lot of property at home and abroad with illegally earned money using his political influence and that of his brother’s.”

It also said the arrestee amassed the ill-gotten money as commission and bribes for helping people win tenders in government offices and getting jobs.

SM Miraj Al Mahmud, a CID inspector, filed the case with Kairul Police Station in Dhaka against former Faridpur AL leader Sajjad Hossain Barkat and his brother Imtiaz Hasan Rubel under the money laundering prevention act on June 26, 2020.

After probe, the CID submitted the charge sheet to a Dhaka court against Mohtesam, former minister Khandaker Mosharraf’s assistant personal secretary AHM Fuad, also an ex-convenor of Faridpur district Jubo League, Barkat, Rubel, and six others.

According to the probe report, Barkat and his brother Rubel amassed Tk 2,535.11 crore beyond their known sources of income.

The siblings amassed the wealth after winning contracts in different government departments in the district through manipulation since 2010. They were also allegedly involved in drug smuggling and land grabbing.

The two brothers had a nexus with Mohtesam and Fuad, and through an illegal syndicate the siblings manipulated all tenders of roads and highways, public works, and health departments, LGED ministry, BRTA, municipalities, zila

parishads, Water Development Board, and medical colleges.

They also illegally collected commission from haats (markets), district land registrars’ offices and extorted money from the transport sector, found the CID probe.

The other charge sheeted accused are: former Faridpur town Jubo League president Khandakar Nazmul Islam Levi, former general secretary of the unit Ashiqur Rahman Farhan, Faridpur district Swachchhasebak League General Secretary Fahad bin Wazed Fahim, former joint convenor of Faridpur town Jubo League Kamrul Hasan David, district Jubo League Joint Convenor Mohammad Ali Minar, and Faridpur town Jubo League Joint Convenor Tariqul Islam Nasim.

Of them, Barkat, Rubel, Fuad and Nasim are now behind bars while Levi and Farhan are on bail.

Barkat, Rubel, Farhan and Levi made confessional statements before magistrates about Mohtesam’s involvement in money laundering, said court sources.

All the accused but Mohtesam have been expelled from their respective organisations.

A district Jubo League leader, also a contractor, yesterday said anyone looking to secure a project contract had to give Mohtesam a commission of 10 to 15 percent of the total project cost.

“He was known in Faridpur as Mr 15 percent,” he told The Daily Star, wishing anonymity.

Contacted, Khandaker Mosharraf said if his brother is found involved in any crime, he would be punished as per law.

Land scam by AL men ‘may be true’

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found that 63,549 acres of land in Laxmipur Mouza no. 115, selected for the university, were heavily overpriced.

The Chandpur Deputy Commissioner’s office began the CSTU land acquisition in May 2021. The DC office estimates that at the artificially hiked rate, the government would have to pay about Tk 553 crore when the actual price of the land is about Tk 193 crore.

This unusually huge gap was discovered by comparing prices of the acquired and non-acquired lands in the same area. The estimate by the DC office is based on the immediate past 12 months’ average land price in the area.

For instance, a 0.99 acre of the proposed land was sold for Tk 23.75 lakh at Tk 24 lakh an acre in different times between May and July 2019. A year later, about 0.31 acre of that property was sold for Tk 1.24 crore, at around Tk 4 crore per acre, according to the land deeds. However, land prices beyond the acquisition area under the same mouza increased only slightly since 2019.

Some local ruling party men were allegedly behind this sharp increase in prices before the acquisition began.

Chairman of Laxmipur union Selim Khan, also the Awami League president of the union unit, and his family members bought about 14.46 acres of land for Tk 38.16 crore between June 2020 and April 2021, according to the deeds.

Besides, Chairman of Chandpur’s Faridganj

upazila Jahidul Islam purchased 1.73 acres at Tk 3.5 crore; Vice president of Chandpur Sadar upazila Ayub Ali Bepari bought about 1 acre at Tk 2.45 crore; Vice president of Chandpur District unit of Awami League Dr Jawadur Rahim Wadud, who is also brother of Education Minister Dipu Moni, purchased about 0.99 acre at Tk 2.71 crore and the minister’s Personal Officer Tutul Mazumder bought 0.4 acre for Tk 1.13 crore, the papers show.

All of them bought the land in one year from May 2020, and there are allegations that some land owners were paid much less than the amount mentioned in the land deeds.

There are also allegations that Selim Khan forced locals to sell their properties, but he refuted them.

Wishing to be unnamed, a labourer said Selim took about 45 decimals of his inherited farmland in exchange for 30 decimals of land in another area.

He was given a simple choice: either hand over the land willingly or lose it, the labourer said.

“We gave the land out of fear,” he said, adding that he was yet to get the 30 decimals of land that Selim had promised.

An official of the sub-registrar office of Chandpur Sadar upazila said in the last one year, no one but Selim Khan and his men could register lands in the particular area.

“Selim Khan has control over the sub-registrar office. People had to sell land to him or give him the power of attorney over their lands,” he said.

Talking to The Daily Star recently, Deputy Attorney General Kazi Mynul Hassan also said that a section of influential individuals, including Salim Khan and his family members, inflated the price of the 62.5 acres of land in Chandpur where the university is planned to be built.

PRE-FIXED The proposal for acquiring the land came with pre-fixed Mouza and ledger (dag) numbers, according to a Chandpur DC office letter to the land ministry on November 16, 2021.

The CSTU VC, who had sent a letter to the DC office requesting it to acquire land for the university, said the education ministry gave the administration approval along with the specific ledger numbers.

“I have no part in this. You’ll see that the total land size is 62,549 acres; neither 63 acres nor 62 acres. It is only possible after calculation of the exact land volume in the ledgers,” he said.

Additional Secretary (development) of the Secondary and Higher Education Division Belayet Hossain Talukdar said, “That’s not correct. It is the DC office that keeps the land records.”

However, Selim Khan in a letter on January 17, 2021, requested the education minister to acquire 13.83 acres of land under ledger numbers 2132 2153; 2155, 2160-2185 and 2193-2199 for the university.

He sent the letter four months after the enactment of the CSTU Act on September 9, 2020.

On the same day, Dipu Moni forwarded the letter

to the education secretary with a note saying: “The two pieces of land are adjacent to each other. It may be good if the land can be acquired for the university. Take measures.”

Later, the land was earmarked for student dormitories.

Contacted, Selim Khan said he had bought the land by paying taxes and following legal procedures and did not force anyone to sell.

Asked why he had bought so much land in a short period at a hefty price, he said he would not comment on the matter because there was a writ petition pending before the court over the issue.

In late January, when different media reported foul play by local ruling party leaders close to the education minister over the land acquisition, Dipu Moni told a press conference that she has close political relations with Selim Khan.

“He [Selim] is president of Awami League’s Laxmipur union unit and chairman of the union... There are 20 chairmen in my constituency. As an MP, I stand by the chairmen in their joy and sorrow,” she said.

“I have good relations with them in the sense that they come to me for different administrative purposes and need my recommendations. I also attend their programmes regularly,” she added.

Jawadur Rahim, brother of the education minister, said he bought the land to build a hospital and a retirement home.

“I sold the land to Selim Khan considering the

conflict of interest as my sister is education minister,” he said, adding that he transferred the ownership on December 6, 2021.

Education minister’s Personal Officer Tutul said that he did not show the land in his wealth statement.

“I get a small amount in salary. It is not taxable. I bought the land borrowing money from my relatives,” he claimed.

On Monday, Dipu Moni told The Daily Star the allegations of price manipulation “may be true”.

“It is not possible [for me] to know everything about a person like where he buys his land,” she said over the phone, referring to the frenzy of large-scale land purchase by some AL men to make hefty sums through alleged deception.

The minister said there should be an impartial probe by a government agency to get to the bottom of the reported scam.

Regarding CSTU VC’s request for funds to complete the land acquisition, she said she already issued directives to release the estimated fund.

Contacted, Anti-Corruption Commission Commissioner Dr Md Mozammel Haque Khan said, “In many cases, we’ve seen foul play taking place before land acquisitions. Permanent structures are built overnight to pocket more money in compensation.”

Asked whether the ACC would probe the matter, he said, “Upon receiving specific allegations, we’ll look into whether they bought the land with

money beyond known sources of income... But it does not mean we’ll sit idle and wait for the allegations to be lodged,” he said.

National Board of Revenue Member (Audit, Intelligence and Investigation) Pradyut Kumar Sarkar said the board will launch an inquiry to find out whether the buyers evaded taxes and disclosed the ownership of the land in their tax returns.

EC to hold

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were planning to invite around 30 educationists for the dialogue including Dhaka University Professor Emeritus Serajul Islam Choudhury, DU Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam, former DU Vice Chancellor AAMS Arefin Siddiqui, and writer and former Shahjalal University of Science and Technology Prof Mohammed Zafar Iqbal, DU VC Prof Md Akhtaruzzaman, North South University VC Prof Atiqul Islam, DU Professor Nazmul Ahsan Kalimullah, Jahangirnagar University teachers Dilara Zaman and AL Masud Hasanuzzaman.

The EC is taking the steps to hold the dialogue when the BNP and several other political parties refrained from taking part in its formation process.

The parties did not join the dialogue with President Abdul Hamid on forming the search committee that recommended names to appoint the chief election commissioner and other election commissioners.

They also did not proposed any names to the search committee for forming the next EC.