

Children with special needs no burden: PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said children with special needs or physically challenged people are not the burden of the society.

“The physically challenged people are one of us, this is the biggest thing,” she said, adding, “We should feel proud of them.”

She said this while addressing the prize-giving ceremony of Bangabandhu Four-Nation Physically Challenged Cricket Tournament-2022 at Sheikh Kamal Cricket Stadium in Cox’s Bazar.

Joining the programme virtually from the Gono Bhaban, the PM said persons with special needs are part of this society and they should not be isolated.

“They are our children, we have to give them all sorts of cooperation; all have to remember this,” she said.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Zahid Ahsan Russel and Secretary of the ministry Mesbah Uddin also spoke at the event.

In the final match, the host Bangladesh team beat India by nine wickets.

The premier declared reward of Tk 500,000 to each of the players of the champion Bangladesh team.

She also declared to create a Tk 10-crore fund for the purpose of sports of the physically challenged persons and children with special needs.

She congratulated all players and officials of the champion team.

On behalf of the PM, the state minister distributed prizes among the champion Bangladesh and the runner-up Indian teams.

On Wednesday evening the girl’s teacher asked her to go to his rented house, owned Lutfur. He then raped and told her he would marry her.



A Ukrainian soldier patrols next to a burned vehicle in the village of Lukianivka near Kyiv on Wednesday. PHOTO: AFP

Nato sees no Russian pull-back in Ukraine

Intel shows Moscow builds forces in Donbas; Kyiv launches rescue bid for besieged city of Mariupol

AGENCIES

Nato is not seeing a pull-back of Russian forces in Ukraine and expects “additional offensive actions,” the alliance’s chief Jens Stoltenberg said yesterday.

“According to our intelligence, Russian units are not withdrawing but repositioning. Russia is trying to regroup, resupply and reinforce its offensive in the Donbas region” in eastern Ukraine, Stoltenberg told a media conference.

“At the same time, Russia maintains pressure on Kyiv and other cities. So, we can expect additional offensive actions, bringing even more suffering.”

The Nato assessment contradicted a pledge by Russian negotiators, made after talks in Turkey this week, to “radically” reduce Moscow’s military activity in northern Ukraine, including near the capital Kyiv.

“We have heard the recent statements that Russia will scale down military operations around Kyiv and in northern Ukraine. But

Russia has repeatedly lied about its intentions. So we can only judge Russia on its actions, not on its words,” Stoltenberg said.

Earlier in the day, President Volodymyr Zelensky said Ukrainian forces are preparing for new Russian attacks in the southeast region where Moscow’s guns are now trained after its assault on the capital Kyiv was repelled.

Five weeks into an invasion that has blasted cities into wastelands and created more than 4 million refugees, US and UK officials said Russian President Vladimir Putin was misled by his generals about the dire performance of Russia’s military.

The Kremlin yesterday denied US and British claims. “This shows that neither the Department of State nor the Pentagon have real information about what is happening in the Kremlin,” Putin’s spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) said it was bringing a convoy of aid to reach besieged Black Sea port of Mariupol,

where tens of thousands of people have been trapped for weeks under bombardment without food, water or heat.

Mariupol, once a city of 400,000 people, has been destroyed by four weeks of relentless bombardment and siege. The United Nations believes thousands of people have died there.

Putin, meanwhile, said yesterday that “unfriendly” countries, including all EU members, will need to set up ruble accounts to pay for gas deliveries from April, reports AFP.

While the United States banned the import of Russian oil and gas, the European Union – which received around 40 percent of its gas supplies from Russia in 2021 – has retained deliveries from Moscow.

“They must open ruble accounts in Russian banks. It is from these accounts that payments will be made for gas delivered starting tomorrow, April 1,” Putin said during a televised government meeting.

He announced that he signed a decree that outlines the “clear and transparent” process.

2 held for student’s rape in Sherpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

Police yesterday arrested a college teacher and a landlord on charges of raping a college student in Sherpur town on Wednesday night.

Jobayer Hossain, 28, a teacher of Chowdhury Sabrunnessa Mahila College in the district’s Nakla upazila, and Lutfur Rahman, 35, landlord of the building Jobayer lives in, are the arrestees.

The victim, a first-year HSC student, filed a case with Sherpur Sadar Police Station early yesterday, after which police arrested the accused, said Md Bondey Ali, OCo of the station.

According to the case statement, on Wednesday evening the girl’s teacher asked her to go to his rented house, owned Lutfur. He then raped and told her he would marry her.

Ukraine war a ‘wake-up call’

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He went on to call for advancing a free, open, secure and international rules-based Indo-Pacific region, which has become the focus of the world powers for trade and strategic reasons.

About 65 percent of the world’s energy is transported through this part of the ocean and two-thirds of the world GDP is generated in the region.

Climate crisis, global health and the future of technology will run through the Indo-Pacific this century, according to Haas, who took up his post last month.

The Indo-Pacific Strategy of the US is neither a military alliance nor a contest between a US-centric region or a China-centric region. It is also not designed to make anyone choose between countries, he said.

The US is developing a comprehensive Indo-Pacific Economic Framework, which will

include shared objectives in key areas: climate and clean energy, fair trade facilitation, resilient supply chains, and the digital economy.

Noting Bangladesh’s strong economic growth and entrepreneurial spirit, he said Washington is committed to working with Dhaka to build an attractive investment environment and support American investors to enter new sectors here.

He noted that Bangladesh has set example to the world by committing to the peaceful resolution of its land and maritime border disputes. Also, Bangladesh is a committed leader to regional cooperation through BIMSTEC, the Indian Ocean Rim Association, Saarc, Colombo Plan.

The US will seek closer security cooperation with partners to tackle challenges ranging from violent extremism to illegal fishing to human

trafficking, said the envoy, while citing the 10 Metal Shark boats and 10 Defender Class boats provided by the US to Bangladesh Navy and Bangladesh Coast Guard last year as a case in point.

Addressing the discussion, Gabriele Visentin, the EU special envoy for the Indo-Pacific, said the unprovoked and unjustified Russian aggression has led to the rise in commodity prices, disrupted supply chains and undermined stability.

Visentin lauded Bangladesh’s support for the humanitarian cause for Ukraine at the UN General Assembly, saying it has strengthened international efforts for peace and stability.

Bangladesh has an important role to play for a free, open and interconnected Indo-Pacific, he said, while praising Bangladesh’s increasing role in international diplomacy.

He stressed on

bolstering the growth of the region and digital technology, green and sustainable infrastructure will be important.

The EU looks at Bangladesh as a partner for closely working on joint projects and advancing connectivity in the Indo-Pacific region, he said.

Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen in a video message said Bangladesh believes in a free and open Indo-Pacific region and an international rules-based system.

Bangladesh is eager to harness the potential of the blue economy, he said, while seeking the support of all.

Indian High Commissioner Vikram Doraiswami and Foreign Ministry Secretary (West) Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury also spoke at the discussion moderated by Tariq Karim, director of the Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies.

Going nowhere as govt keeps flip-flopping

FROM PAGE 1

The government signed a deal with the ADB the following month to carry out a feasibility study and make a detailed design spending Tk 97.87 crore.

Over two years later, the study was placed before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, who gave consent to building the expressway consisting of elevated sections. The estimated construction cost for the 217-kilometre-long expressway was \$2.5 billion, sources said.

Meanwhile, in October 2016, the Bangladesh Bridge Authority took an initiative to build an elevated expressway on the same corridor.

Later, the roads transport and bridges minister asked it to drop the initiative.

But, the prime minister in October 2019 ordered cancellation of the expressway project. She ordered construction of service lanes on either side of the four-lane highway, sources said.

In October last year, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs formally scrapped the plan. Abdus Sabur, then chief engineer of the Roads and Highways Division, told this correspondent that the prime minister was in favour of building a high-speed rail system along the highway.

In March 2017, the BR carried out a feasibility study and made a detailed design of a high speed train, spending Tk 110 crores.

She approved a 224.64-km Dhaka-Narayanganj-Cumilla-Feni-Chatto gram route which would bring the travel time from the capital to the port city to just 55-73 minutes at a cost of Tk 93,350.93 crore.

But talking to this correspondent in October last year, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan said the government would “go slow”, considering the expenses.

THE LATEST PLANS

The government is mostly

taking piecemeal measures to keep the highway in a functioning state.

The RHD in September 2019 took a Tk 793.14 crore maintenance project. The deadline of the project is June 2023, but the RHD has yet to appoint a contractor for it.

Within two years of the formal opening of the four-lane highway in 2017, the road suffered substantial damage, necessitating the maintenance from Cumilla to Chattogram.

The RHD in July 2021 took another project to build three underpasses and a u-loop on different parts of the highway, spending Tk 568.93 crore. The deadline was set in June 2024.

The RHD is about to start a feasibility study to see whether two more lanes can be added to the main road and service lanes can be built on both sides of the highway. Once a consultant is hired, the study will take 18 months to complete, an

official said.

But several RHD officials said adding more lanes would not be enough to meet the growing traffic. “The government would have to go for a limited-access expressway. When it eventually does go for that, the project cost would be much higher,” a top RHD engineer said.

RHD Chief Engineer AKM Manir Hossain Pathan said upgrading the Dhaka-Chatto gram highway depended on policy decisions.

“But, for now, we are working to build a service lane along both sides of the highway as per the directive of the prime minister,” he told The Daily Star yesterday.

This correspondent found Planning Minister Abdul Mannan’s phone switched off and could neither reach State Minister Shamsul Alam nor Road Transport and Highway Division Secretary Nazrul Islam.

Bangladeshi journo, engineer

FROM PAGE 1

After the embassy in Libya contacted various government departments there, the Libyan authorities on March 26 confirmed that the journalist and the engineer were taken into their “safe custody”.

As part of efforts to have the two released, the ambassador met the country’s vice president

on Wednesday. The two have been released after that.

Talking to The Daily Star last night, the ambassador said, “With the cooperation of all, the Bangladeshi journalist and the engineer have been released. Engineer Tipu is with his family. Journalist Zahidur is now in the embassy. He will

return home soon.”

According to family sources, Zahid flew to London on a family visa by a Turkish Airlines flight earlier in the month. From there, he traveled to Ireland, Scotland, and then to Libya. He, along with Tipu and Khaled, visited several places in Tripoli and took pictures before being picked up by

the Libyan authorities.

Khaled was released earlier.

Contacted, Zahid’s wife Taslima Rahman said they were yet to be able to reach her husband. “We are extremely happy that he has been freed. We are waiting for his return home eagerly.”

Shariful Hasan is a journalist writing for The Daily Star.

Edible oil prices rise again at Khatunganj

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, City

The prices of loose soybean and palm oil have gone up by Tk 150-200 per maund at Chattogram’s Khatunganj wholesale market overnight for a supply crisis although the importers maintain there is no shortage at their end.

“The supply is not even half the market demand,” said Abdur Rahman, a wholesale trader in the Khatunganj market.

The dealers have rationed the supply of oil of all brands in the market, he said, adding that wholesalers were compelled to buy oil at a higher price than the government-set price.

The government has fixed the wholesale price of loose soybean oil at Tk 136 per litre and palm oil at Tk 127 per litre.

In turn, the traders are selling the edible oil at Tk 7-11 more per litre in the port city markets.

It was not possible to supply oil as per the demand due to the reduced supply of oil from the mill, said Shahedul Alam, a dealer of City Group and proprietor of RN Trading.

“The price of any product goes up if the supply is less than the demand. If the supply is not increased, there is no point in monitoring the market via the mobile courts,” he added.

Loose soybean oil was selling at Tk 5,800-6,000 per maund (about 37 kilograms) and loose palm oil at Tk 5,170-5,320 at Khatunganj wholesale hub.

Biswajit Saha, director for corporate and regulatory affairs of City Group, a leading commodities importer, maintains that the supply of edible oil is normal.

The benefit of the government’s duty waiver on edible oil is not reaching the consumers due to poor surveillance of the markets and mill gates, said SM Nazir Hossain, president of the Chattogram chapter of the Consumers’ Association Bangladesh.

Multiple teams of district administration are monitoring the market regularly, said Sumani Akhter, additional deputy magistrate.

4 killed in accidents in Dinajpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Three people were killed after their motorcycle crashed into a roadside tree in Dinajpur’s Nawabganj upazila early yesterday, said police.

In another accident, a vegetable vendor died in Birampur upazila.

The three victims are Rimon Islam, 22, son of Rabiul Islam of Uttar Shyampur village, Sabbir Hossain, 23, son of Zahidul Islam of Kanchdah village, and Kibria Islam, 30, son of Yasin Ali of Narayanpur village under Nawabganj upazila.

Ferdous Wahid, officer-in-charge of Nawabganj Police Station, said the three were going to Kanchdah village in a motorcycle. When they reached Alamnagar village around 12:30am, Kibria lost control and the motorcycle crashed into a roadside tree.

The three died on the spot, the OC said, adding that the bodies were handed over to their families.

In the other accident, vegetable vendor Mozaffar Rahman was critically injured as a truck hit him at Kolabagan village in Birampur upazila yesterday morning. He was crossing a road.

Locals rushed him to Rangpur Medical College Hospital, where he died, said Sumon Mohanta, officer-in-charge of Birampur Police Station.