

'Let's roll up our sleeves, realise our dreams'

Says Chinese ambassador

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The newly appointed Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Yao Wen has said that China and Bangladesh will closely cooperate and coordinate on regional and multilateral affairs for more stability and certainty in today's uncertain and unstable world.



Yao Wen

"As an old saying in China goes, 'a year's plan starts with spring', now it is the season of spring in the Bangladeshi calendar and Chinese relations with Bangladesh are also ushering in spring with new vigour and vitality," he said at a reception organised by the Chinese embassy at its premises, marking the welcome of the newly-appointed ambassador yesterday.

"Let's roll up our sleeves together and kick off to realise our respective dreams and embrace an even brighter future of China-Bangladesh relations," Ambassador Yao said. Chief of Army Staff General SM Shafiqul Islam, Prime Minister's Private Secretary and Investment Adviser Salim F Rahman, and Foreign Minister Secretary (West) Shabbir Ahmad Chowdhury were present.

Yao Wen said he is fully convinced that China-Bangladesh relations will set a good example for developing countries to understand, trust and support each other.

"Last three years were difficult for all of us due to the Covid-19 pandemic. However, we are seeing the light at the end of the tunnel," he said.

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina addressing an event titled "Investment in Research and Development in LDCs for Smart and Innovative Societies" at Qatar National Convention Centre in Doha yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

Russian positions at Bakhmut in peril

Says chief of Wagner mercenary force as fighting rages in Ukraine; Kyiv says forces are holding on

REUTERS, Kyiv

The head of Russia's Wagner mercenary force yesterday warned that Russia's position around the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut was in peril unless his troops got ammunition, the latest sign of tension between the Kremlin and the private militia chief.

Ukrainian military officials and analysts also reported leaders of Russia's 155th Brigade fighting near the town of Vuhledar, south of Bakhmut, were resisting orders to attack after sustaining severe losses in attempts to capture it.

For its part, the Russian Defence Ministry on Sunday said Russian forces had hit a command centre of the Ukrainian Azov Regiment in southeastern Zaporizhzhia region. The ministry did not elaborate on the attack.

Kyiv said yesterday its troops were still holding out in a "hellish" fight for Bakhmut, while Washington said that even if the eastern Ukrainian city should fall to a Russian offensive, it would not necessarily give Moscow momentum in the war.

Speaking to reporters in the Middle East, US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said he would not predict when or if Ukrainian troops might leave the city, but that its fall "won't necessarily mean that the Russians have changed the tide of this fight".

"I think it is more of a symbolic value than it is strategic and operational value," Austin said.

Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin said Russia's front lines near Bakhmut could collapse if his forces did not receive the ammunition promised by Moscow in

February.

"For now, we are trying to figure out the reason: is it just ordinary bureaucracy or a betrayal," Prigozhin, referring to the absence of ammunition, said in his press service Telegram channel early yesterday.

He also said his representative at operational headquarters had had his pass cancelled and been denied access.

There was no immediate response from the Russian Ministry of Defence. Since the start of this year, the Ukraine campaign has been commanded personally by Russia's top general, Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov.

Apart from Bakhmut, Russia's offensive has produced no notable gains, failing to seize ground in Luhansk province further north and taking heavy losses in particular around Vuhledar to the south.

What's their

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holding programmes one after another, said Amu.

"All of our activists are busy with the Awami League's programmes. We are not getting any scope for holding separate programmes of the alliance."

Amu, also an advisory council member of AL, alleged that the alliance partners cannot gather crowds for the rallies.

"Holding a programme is not about delivering speeches by 11 persons from 14 parties. There has to be a huge gathering of people. They cannot bring people for the rallies and those who [AL men] can do this are now busy," he added.

Asked if the AL is taking any initiative to bring other like-minded parties to its fold, he said no such decision has been made as of now.

There is a top-heavy imbalance

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is not effective at all times and at all levels, nothing can be done. If the Awami League wants it only to be an electoral alliance, there will be a negotiation on seat sharing."

A lawmaker from Dhaka-8 constituency, Menon said the AL chief is committed to participating in the election under the banner of the 14-party alliance, and they are going ahead keeping this in mind.

About the AL wooing the religion-based parties to the alliance, Menon said the ruling party leaders never discussed the issue and they never do.

Asked whether it's a deviation from the ideological stance of the 14-party alliance, he said, these are parts of electoral strategy and they can do so as part of their electoral strategy.

Menon came down heavily on the AL government saying, "Corruption has not only reached the upper level of the society but also the grassroots. Money laundering is increasing day by day. The government's zero-tolerance policy against corruption doesn't seem to be effective in these cases."

Golden period

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he was not sure whether the AL would reactivate the alliance or it is planning otherwise. "We would have known if there was a meeting of the alliance."

The golden period of the alliance is over, he continued. "Democratic values which were at the core of commitment of 14 parties do not seem to exist anymore."

Stating that they have no other choice than waiting for AL's signal on whether to participate in the next election separately or under the banner of the alliance, Dilip Barua said, "We will comply with the decision of the bigger parties in this regard."

Commenting that the AL and BNP have no difference in terms of patronising looters, he said, "The Awami League is patronising the looters and the rich like the way the BNP did. They are doing it more ingeniously."

"As a result, inflation is soaring, and it doesn't seem to be going down. Looters and upper-class people are at the centre of their economic mechanism, most of them are lawmakers and ministers. In all sectors, corruption has taken an institutional form," he added.

14-party fragile as AL 'shifts rightwards'

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they stood by the grand old party even amid controversies over massive polls irregularities and widespread graft.

Leaders of the left allies say the ruling party turns to its lightweight partners only when it faces a crisis. But when the party formed the government in 2019 for a third consecutive time, they were left out.

Another major factor that frustrates them is that the AL has already started campaigning for the "boat" while keeping its allies in the dark about whether it would take part in the upcoming election on its own or under the banner of the coalition.

Besides, the alliance is currently only Dhaka-based and it has no existence at the grassroots.

On February 25, Workers Party President Rashed Khan Menon at a rally in Rajshahi slammed the Awami League and said the 14-party alliance is "non-functional".

He also said his party would certainly take part in the next election with his party symbol "hammer", not with "boat".

The 14-party was formed in 2005, comprising the 11 party left combine, Awami League, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and National Awami Party (NAP).

Earlier in 1998, the Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB), Gono Forum, Workers

Party, Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD-Khalequzzaman), Bangladesher Samajtantrik Dal (BSD-Mahub), Gono Azadi League, Gonotantri Party, Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal, Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal, Communist Kendro and Gonotantri Majdur Party formed the 11-party combine.

When the AL forged an alliance with the 11-party in 2005, CPB, BSD (Khalequzzaman) and Nirmal Sen-led Sramik Krishak Samajbadi Dal stayed away. Later, the Gono Forum left the 11-party combine.

Tarikat Federation and Jatiya Party (JP-Manju) joined hands with the 14-party alliance ahead of the 2008 national polls.

Meanwhile, Bangladesher Samyabadi Dal split into three parts — led by Dilip Barua, Nurul Islam and Harun Chowdhury. Of them, Nurul Islam-led Jatiya Party and Mostafa Amir Faisal Mujaddedi led Zaker Party joining the AL-led camp.

Before the 2018 national polls, Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh was brought into the Grand Alliance and its candidates contested the election with "boat".

Now with the general election slated for early next year, the AL has started approaching several political parties outside the 14-party combine. It has also begun talks with Kader Siddique-led Krishak Sramik Janata League.

missed in political arena since its president Abdus Samad passed away.

Before the last parliamentary election, another new political alliance called "Juktofront" was formed with Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh, Bangladesh Krishak Sramik Janata League, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and Nagarik Oikya.

Krishak Sramik Janata League, Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal (JSD) and Nagarik Oikya joined the Jatiya Oikyafront led by eminent jurist and Gono Forum President Dr Kamal Hossain. Bikalpa Dhara participated in the national polls under the banner of Grand Alliance.

The AL took part in the 2008, 2014 and 2018 elections under the banner of Grand Alliance that included the 14 party. Just before the 2008 election, the Grand Alliance was formed with the Jatiya Party and Mostafa Amir Faisal Mujaddedi led Zaker Party joining the AL-led camp.

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Women still made to lag far behind

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former female divisional commissioner Dr Mosammat Nazmun Ara Khanum, who now serves as the secretary of the food ministry, no other female has been appointed as a divisional commissioner since then.

Additionally, the report found there are some ministries where the representation of women is particularly low, with a negligible percentage of female officers and staffers.

Mentioning the "Gender Budget Report 2019-2020" of the Finance Division, the report also showed that the fisheries and livestock ministry has the highest percentage of female officials at 27.59 percent, while the primary and mass education ministry has the lowest at only eight percent — down from 14 percent in 2017.

It further highlighted that female staff representation is insignificant in almost all ministries, indicating a widespread deprivation of opportunities for women.

A comparison of data between 2017-18 and 2018-19 revealed a worrying trend, with a decrease in the percentage of women in staff positions, suggesting that fewer women are being appointed to these roles.

The report mentioned that policymakers should look into the reasons behind such employment gaps in the administration.

According to Planning Commission member Mosammat Nasima Begum, the number of women applying for civil services is fewer than the males because the number of female students who completed their tertiary education is much lower than their male counterparts.

Her claim is further validated by the Labour Force Survey 2016-17, which showed that the percentage of females who completed their tertiary education is less than half of the males, and the ratio is worse in the rural areas.

Girls who dominated their secondary-level gradually fell behind in higher secondary and tertiary levels, the survey showed.

Nasima added that a lack of encouragement from families is mainly what keeps women from participating in the civil services examinations.

"For example, when a son in the family completes his graduation, the parents treat him in a way that getting a government job should be the only choice for him. But for their daughters, they consider marrying them off instead."

About employment discriminations, she said there might be a level of inequity as women are still not appointed in some core positions, such as cabinet, land or home secretary.

"But this never means women are incapable of shouldering these duties."

In the police administration, Deputy Inspector General Shamima Begum, who is also the vice president of Bangladesh Police Women Network, told The Daily Star that the percentage of female police officers is now around eight, up from two percent a decade ago.

"The number of female police officials in leadership is still less because the recruitment was postponed towards the end of the eighties for almost 10 years."

"We don't face any discriminations in our services, but from my experience,

PILOT HIRING SCAM

Biman finally launches probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Biman Bangladesh Airlines yesterday formed a three-member committee to investigate the allegations of irregularities in hiring Boeing 777 pilots and paying them hefty salaries.

Captain Siddiqueur Rahman, director of flight operations at Biman, was made the convener of the committee while Capt Enam Talukder, chief of flight safety, was made member, and Taposh Ahmed, deputy chief of training, was made member secretary.

The probe body was asked to submit its report within three working days.

It will also investigate the alleged forgery of HSC certificate by Sadia Ahmed, a first officer of Boeing 777.

Sadia is the wife of Biman Chief of Training Capt Sazid Ahmed.

The state flag carrier formed the probe body in response to a report run by The Daily Star on March 1 under the headline "Biman paying for hiring unqualified Boeing 777 pilots".

According to the report, Biman in February last year recruited a batch of contractual pilots to fly its Boeing 777-300ER aircraft, claiming that it needed pilots immediately due to a shortage.

A year later, only five of the batch of 14 pilots, have taken to the air. The rest are lost in a quagmire of forged certificates, incompetence and failed licensing exams.

Charges framed against ex-Ducsu VP Nur in DSA case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detective Branch of police yesterday pressed charges against former Ducsu vice-president Nurul Haque Nur in a case filed over "hurting religious sentiments of Awami League activists and its supporters and defaming the party with his derogatory comments".

Md Saiful Islam, an inspector of the Cyber and Special Crime Division of DB and also the investigation officer of the case, appealed to the court to issue an arrest warrant against him.

On February 28, the IO submitted the charge sheet against Nur to the Dhaka Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court.

I've seen that many women can't take up new challenges for family or personal reasons."

Dr Fauzia Moslem, president of Bangladesh Mahila Parishad, said it was disheartening to see such a dismal picture of women's participation at the administration level even after 50 years of independence.

"In order to ensure higher participation of women at the administrative level, the government must have proactive plans and programmes to prepare them for those positions."

Obstacles such as a lack of safe transportation and daycare facilities are also reasons behind the low levels of female employment. Such issues need to be addressed first, she added.

Shireen Huq, founder member of Naripokkho, said, "I salute the 113 women upazila nirbahi officers for their confidence and courage in taking up these positions. They have to not only negotiate resistance from family, but also have to tackle gender stereotypes that are thrown in their paths almost daily."

"Government programmes for stipends for girls in secondary schools have produced the dividend of more girls going for higher education. The government can put in place affirmative action in the recruitment of women. This is not to suggest any compromise with qualifications, but to give deliberate preference to equally qualified female candidates."

She further said, "Once women are recruited, trained and posted, the government has to ensure safe working conditions, safe accommodation and safe transport."

Invest in

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"I also urge the non-resident Bangladeshis based in Qatar to invest in Bangladesh. We need your participation in our nation-building efforts," she said.

Hasina said that Bangladesh's bilateral relations with Qatar should be readjusted based on a mutually beneficial economic partnership as there is immense untapped potential.

She also put emphasis on setting up a joint committee on trade and investment and a joint business forum to bring private sectors on a single platform.

The PM said Bangladesh's agricultural growth also creates scope for cooperation in agro-processing industries, with buy-back arrangements.

"We have plans to set up three special tourism zones, where Qatar can engage in both real estate and hospitality sectors."

She said the country's vibrant start-up scene is ready to draw Qatari investment.

Qatari investors, she said, can consider portfolio investment in Bangladesh.

"Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission is working hard to further develop our capital markets. We have taken several steps to establish our bond market on a solid footing. We are soon going to include derivative products in our capital markets," the PM said.