



PM leaves for Doha today

She'll attend Qatar Economic Forum on May 23-25

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will leave Dhaka for Doha today on a three-day official visit to attend the Qatar Economic Forum 2023 scheduled to be held on May 23-25.

A VVIP flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, carrying the premier and her entourage, will depart Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 3:00pm.

The flight is scheduled to land at Hamad International Airport at 6:00pm local time (9:00pm Bangladesh Time).

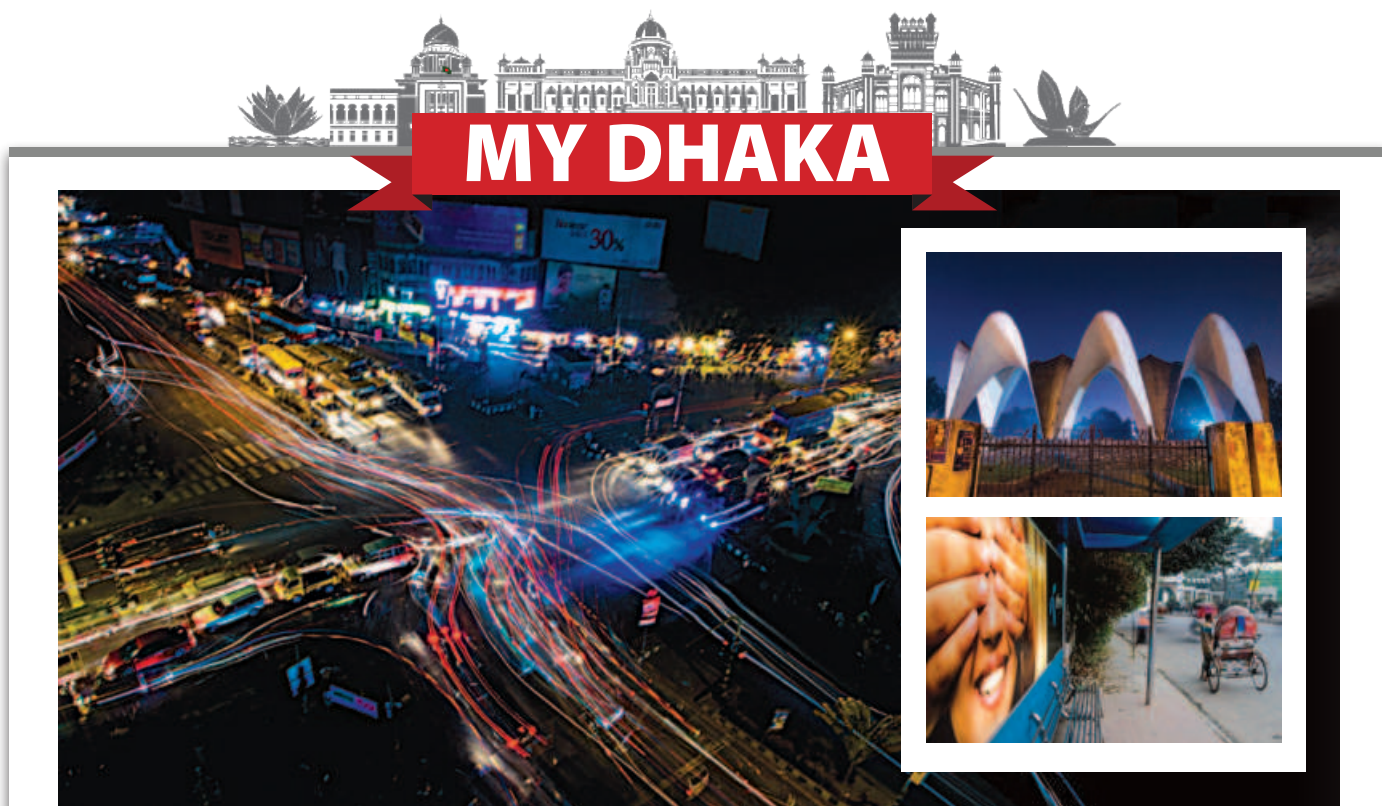
The prime minister will attend the Forum titled "3rd Qatar Economic Forum: A New Global Growth Story" at the invitation of the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

The Qatar Economic Forum is the Middle East's leading voice dedicated to global business and investment. The main objective of this forum is to find a solution by increasing mutual cooperation among the international community to deal with the multi-faceted challenges and crises going on globally and the adverse economic consequences arising from them.

On May 23, Sheikh Hasina will join the opening session of the 3rd Qatar Economic Forum, address the students of Qatar University in Doha, and hold meetings separately with Qatar Minister of State for Energy Affairs Saad bin Sherida Al Kaabi and Minister of Investment of Saudi Arabia Khalid A Al-Falih.

On May 24, the PM will join the forum, hold a meeting with the Emir of Qatar Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani (at Amiri Divan) and visit Awsaj Academy (a specialised school).

Sheikh Hasina is expected to arrive home on May 25 morning.



This city holds my heart

NAVID ANJUM

Urban life with its whirlwind of chaos and cacophony has an allure that captivates me. The bustling streets, the vibrant markets, and the din of horns merging into a symphony of urban rhythm all blend to create a kaleidoscope of experiences. Amid this chaos, there is a certain beauty and an inexplicable charm.

Let us not romanticise this urban existence without acknowledging its faults. Dhaka, as a city, is far from being perfect. Its streets are marred by traffic congestion, the air heavy with pollution, and the infrastructure strained under the weight of a burgeoning population. The flaws are evident and we cannot turn a blind eye to them.



Yet, despite thousands of faults, I am drawn to this city like a moth to a flame. It is here that I have grown, learned, and forged lasting connections. The very essence of Dhaka has engaged me, and try as I may, I cannot escape its clutches. It is

the familiar faces, the vibrant cultures, and the shared experiences that have woven themselves into the fabric of my existence.

*"The city holds my heart
Within walls of glass and steel
Can't you see I just can't go?
These walls are all I know
The city holds my heart
Like a shell
I cannot feel surrounds."*
— Margaux Sauvé



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

These poignant words by the French-Canadian singer-songwriter resonate deep within me as I reflect upon the city that has shaped my existence. Dhaka — the metropolis that engulfs, enchants, and forever holds me captive. It is a city that has become an integral part of my being, and its spirit flows through my veins.

In Dhaka, I have discovered the depths of human resilience. It is a city that has weathered storms and emerged stronger. Its people, diverse in their backgrounds

and beliefs, share an unwavering spirit of determination. Together, we navigate through the hurdles, savouring the triumphs, and embracing the setbacks. It is this collective resilience that binds us, reminding me of the strength I possess within.

Although enchanted by its vibrancy, I am repelled by its imperfections. So, I embrace the chaos, the imperfections, and the constant evolution of this city. It is here that I have learned to adapt,

to find strength in the face of adversity, and to appreciate the myriad shades of life. I have discovered my resilience and my capacity for growth.

In the end, we all carry within us the essence of the places we call home. Dhaka, with all its flaws and splendours, will forever remain intertwined with my identity. It is a part of me — a city that holds my heart, encompassing my past, present, and future within its boundaries of concrete.

The writer is a communication professional.

Contract farming takes over poultry industry

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This model significantly drops production costs and ensures that big companies make profits even when market prices drop. But marginal farmers cannot replicate this model as they have to buy chicks and feed from the same companies or their dealers at higher prices.

At the end of the day, small farmers cannot compete as large companies often sell chickens at a price lower than the small farmers' production cost, said Sumon.

Dhaka School of Economics Director Jahangir Alam Khan said, "The country's poultry market is very unstable. By the time the government intervenes to bring stability, the syndicate has pocketed a huge sum."

Poultry feed plays a key role in the increase of production costs for marginal farmers.

Maize and soybean meal are the main constituents of poultry feed ingredients. Even though maize is grown in Bangladesh, companies have to import maize and soybean to meet the growing demand for feed.

According to data collected by BPA, in 2021, the price of maize was Tk 28 per kg and the chicken feed price was Tk 50 per kg. Maize price was the same in 2022 but the companies hiked the feed price to Tk 54 per kg.

In February this year, the feed price rose to Tk 74.8 per kg when the maize price was Tk 38-39 per kg. In March, the maize price dropped to Tk 24 per kg but the feed price remained unchanged.

Only recently, the feed price has been reduced by an insignificant Tk 1.5 per kg.

Kazi Zahidul Hasan, founder and managing director of Kazi Farms, said there is no "syndicate" manipulating the prices of DOCs.

"When broiler prices are low in the market, farmers buy fewer chicks to avoid losses. This results in falling DOC prices. When broiler prices are attractively high, there is a mad rush

among farmers to buy chicks. This causes the DOC prices to skyrocket," he said.

As for the price of feed, he said feed prices are dependent on several factors including the prices of ingredients, electricity and diesel, ocean freights, and the value of dollars.

"Severe inflationary pressures can be seen all over the world since the beginning of the war in Ukraine. Prices of all items have gone up substantially. This is the reason behind the huge feed price escalation," he said.

Paragon Group Managing Director Moshir Rahman said small and big farms have been blaming each other for more than a year now.

"I don't have much to say regarding this," said Moshir, also president of Bangladesh Poultry Industries Central Council.

Over the years the poultry industry has grown exponentially in Bangladesh. In May 2020, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Bangladesh published a report titled "Poultry Sector Study Bangladesh". It estimated that about 3.7 billion euros was invested in the poultry sector in 2019 and about 899 million broiler, Sonali, layer and native chickens were produced that year.

Approximately seven million tonnes of chicken feed were produced in 2019. The broiler feed market is expected to produce 2.3 million tonnes of feed in 2025, reads the study.

The study also said dealers sell DOCs and feed to farmers on credit while they get discounted prices from feed producers and they have strong negotiation power over feed prices.

According to the National Poultry Development Policy 2008 (NPDP 2008), proper technical assistance will be given to marginal and poor farmers so that they can earn through poultry farming. It tasks the Department of Livestock Services (DLS) with monitoring the poultry

markets, dispelling anomalies, reducing the influence of dealers, and protecting marginal farmers.

However, BPA leaders alleged that the DLS is extending support to big companies.

Referring to a draft amendment to the NPDP 2008, Sumon said, "The draft policy lends validity to contract farming, without addressing the issues arising from it."

Contacted, DLS Director General Emdadul Haque Talukder said there is a difference between production cost and selling price. "We're working to reduce the gap so that intermediaries cannot take advantage of it. We've already succeeded in minimising the gap to some extent," he said, adding that the DLS is working to protect the interest of both consumers and producers.

When his attention was drawn to the problems faced by marginal farmers, he said poultry is a rising industry and that the DLS is working to address all anomalies plaguing the sector.

BPA leaders also said that there are many instances in which farmers complying with contract farming incurred losses and were legally harassed.

Mahmudur Rahman Akash, a poultry farmer of Jhenidah, is facing a Tk 50 lakh lawsuit filed by a large company.

About eight months ago, he entered into a contract with the company, for which he had to sign a blank cheque which did not mention any date.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the contract which contains 35 conditions, most of which serve the interests of the company.

"They gave me 2,500 chicks. About 500 of them died of a disease. As they did not provide me with the required medicine on time, I declined to continue farming with them," he said.

After that, the company filed the case. "In the case, they showed me as

their business partner, whereas I was only involved in contract farming," he added.

About 10,000 farmers and dealers, mostly from Bogura, Joypurhat and Jhenidah are facing cases related to blank cheques, said BPA leaders.

"There needs to be strong monitoring and support by the government to protect marginal farmers from losses," said Prof Anwarul Haque Beg of the Department of Poultry Science at Sher-e-Bangla Agricultural University, who is also involved in the amendment of the National Poultry Development Policy 2008.

Jahangir said the relevant government department should monitor and check price manipulation but it is not doing so.

He suggested that the government provide loans at simple interest rates to small farmers. "This will rein in the dominance of the big companies," he said.

495 BNP men sued

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Moniruzzaman said legal action would be taken after an investigation of the cases.

The BNP was supposed to hold a public rally in front of the Patuakhali district BNP office at 10:00am on Saturday.

Just before the rally was about to start, a clash broke out between the activists of BNP and Awami League and its associate bodies Chhatra League and Jubo League.

Contacted, district BNP member secretary Snehanshu Sarkar Kutty said, "Awami League leaders and activists, including those of the Chhatra League and Jubo League, attacked our peaceful rally and looted it."

"More than 100 of our leaders and workers suffered injuries. None of our men attacked AL leaders and activists."

"We are also preparing to file a case against the attackers," he added.

No reason for US to impose

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US in 2021 announced sanctions on Rab and seven of its current and former officials for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and other forms of rights violations.

The same year, the Biden administration did not invite Bangladesh to its Democracy Summit.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is not happy with Washington because the US is not repatriating a self-confessed killer of Bangabandhu and is supporting Prof Muhammad Yunus, the Kalbela report said.

After returning from the US recently, Hasina at an event said that Bangladesh would not buy anything from countries that impose sanctions on Bangladesh.

In recent months, US Ambassador Peter Haas has repeatedly said that the US wants free and fair polls in Bangladesh.

This year, a series of high-level US officials visited Bangladesh and advocated for free and fair polls.

Washington also proposed signing two defence agreements with Dhaka as the latter seeks to buy equipment from

the US.

The US, which is the largest single market for Bangladesh's garment products, also expressed concerns over labour rights and the Digital Security Act in Bangladesh.

Yesterday, Agriculture Minister Razzaque said as an independent and sovereign country, Bangladesh never expects foreign interference in its internal matters.

"There is an elected government and [there] will be another election after six months. It will be held according to the constitution," he said.

Regarding the Kalbela report, the US embassy in Dhaka yesterday told UNB that the US maintained a "broad and deep" relationship with Bangladesh.

Meanwhile, the foreign ministry in a statement said the Kalbela report falsely stated that Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen used to work as a lobbyist for a Chinese firm before he became a minister.

"Such publicity against the foreign minister is tantamount to defaming him and tarnishing the country's image," the statement said.

Questions to be raised

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Addressing the event, Brig Gen (ret'd) M Sakhawat Hussain, a former election commissioner, criticised the Election Commission for failing to create a conducive environment for voters so that they can go to the polling centres without any fear and obstacle.

He added that if the elections are not competitive, voters will not show interest in casting votes.

Sakhawat said even activists of political parties will not go to polling centres because they know that their candidates will win.

The former election commissioner said the EC cannot prove its capability by holding the five city polls as the polls are going to be lopsided.

Tofail Ahmed, a local governance expert, said the election process is not followed properly as there is a lack of competitiveness.

US embassy alerts its citizens ahead of national polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The US embassy in Dhaka has issued an alert to US citizens fearing an escalation of violence ahead of the next national elections and advised them to remain vigilant.

"The next general election is anticipated to occur before or during January 2024, and political party rallies and other election-related activities have already commenced. Political rallies and demonstrations may be held with increasing frequency or intensity as the general election draws nearer," said the US embassy in a statement yesterday.

It advised that US citizens should practice vigilance and remember that demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence.

"You should avoid demonstrations and exercise caution in the vicinity of any large gatherings. Review personal security plans; remain aware of your surroundings, including local events; and monitor local news stations for updates," the embassy said.

The embassy last issued such alerts on December 29, 2022.

Schoolteacher jailed for helping SSC examinee cheat

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A schoolteacher was sent to jail for a month for helping an SSC examinee cheat in the exams in Tangail's Mirzapur upazila yesterday.

The teacher is Ariful Islam, assistant headmaster of Haat Fotepur High School.

Farhad Hossain, Mirzapur upazila statistics officer, also the tag officer of Mirzapur Pilot Girls' High School centre, caught the teacher red-handed. He continued to commit the crime after repeated warnings.

On information, Executive Magistrate Aminul Islam Bulbul, also assistant commissioner (land) of Mirzapur, went to the spot and passed the order.

Man beaten to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A batter-run three-wheeler driver was beaten to death allegedly by a youth in Mymensingh's Ishwarganj yesterday.

The victim is Soheli Mia, 19, of Guilakanda village in the upazila.

Moynal Mia, son of Sarisha Union Parishad Member Abul Hashem, beat Soheli senseless as Soheli's knocked him while he was crossing a road, said Jahangir Alam, inspector of Atharabari Police Investigation Centre in Ishwarganj.

Soheli was rushed to Ishwarganj Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead, he added.

Police recovered the body and sent it to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.