

PM reaches Geneva to attend ILO summit



UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina reached Geneva, Switzerland yesterday to attend the two-day “World of Work Summit: Social Justice for All” to be held in the city today and tomorrow.

A regular flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying the prime minister landed at Geneva Airport at 5:10pm local time (9:10pm Bangladesh time), PM’s Speechwriter Md Nazrul Islam said.

Earlier, the flight departed Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport around 10:00am.

Today, UN High Commissioner for Refugees chief Filippo Grandi will call on the prime minister at the bilateral room of Hotel President Wilson.

Later the PM will call on the President of the Swiss Confederation Alain Berset at Palais de Nations. Afterwards, there is a possibility of signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on knowledge and skills enhancement between Bangladesh and Switzerland.

In the afternoon, the prime minister will address the Plenary of the “World of Work Summit 2023” at Palais de Nations.

She will also have a call with the President of Malta Dr George Vella.

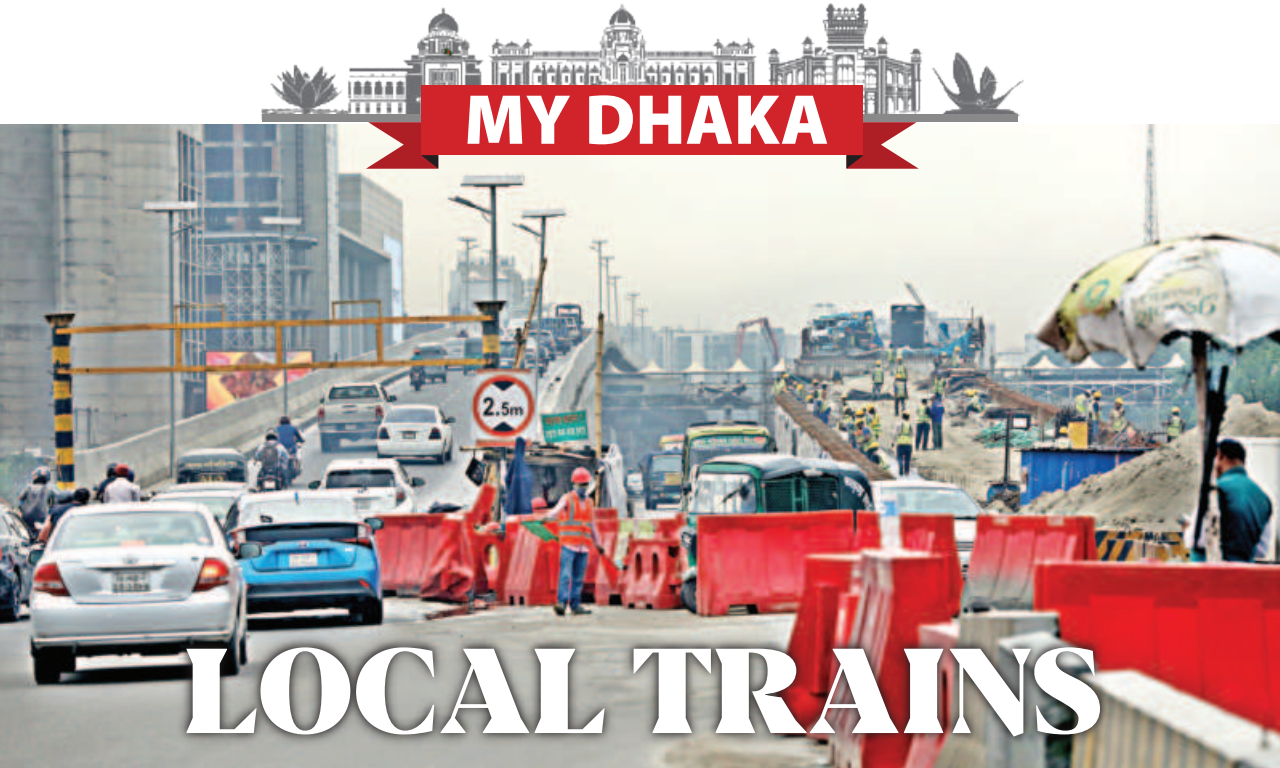
In the evening, the PM will attend a dinner with high-level dignitaries hosted by the International Labour Organisation at its headquarters.

Tomorrow, she will attend the “A talk at the WEF”, followed by a meeting with the founder of WEF Prof Klaus Schwab at the World Economic Forum’s Office.

There, she will address the event on “New Economy and Society in Smart Bangladesh”.

In the evening, World Trade Organisation Director-General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala will call on her at Hotel President Wilson. She will also attend a community event in the evening.

Commuting from Uttara to Karwan Bazar is a nightmare. If it has to be put into perspective in terms of hours, it takes approximately 1 hour and 30 minutes on a good day. When the traffic is not in your favour, there are instances of being stuck on the road for almost 2 hours 45 minutes.



a viable solution for Dhaka’s traffic woes?

RBR

Exiting Uttara, especially now with all the chaos of Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) construction happening around the airport area, is indeed a test of patience. The never-ending BRT project, which was supposed to ease the traffic congestion is now the sole reason for taking 30 minutes or more to just cross the airport intersection. Pedestrians, construction debris, and men at work have all added to the commotion, and Uttara residents try to avoid this main access road connecting Uttara to Dhaka like a rogue.

With the start of the metro rail, a lot of these traffic problems have eased further north of Uttara no doubt. In fact, there is a beautiful road joining Uttara to Mirpur giving the residents a better second option to commute. Then there is the detour of roughly 22 km from Ashulia to Dhanmondi via Beribadh Road. There is less traffic on this highway and is the most favoured option to commute from Uttara regularly.

The other non-conventional way to exit Uttara for central Dhaka is by availing the local train. This ride, as a means of public transport in Dhaka, is faster but not without suffering. Yet,



PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

for Uttara residents, availing the local train is far easier than a bus ride.

If you take an intercity train ride, the ticket comes at Tk 25. For the local train, the price is Tk 20. The train compartment is crowded and you do not find space to stand. Many office-goers to Motijheel, Sayedabad, and areas like Paltan choose this option of travel.

Dhaka as a city is now choked with traffic. While many theories are being projected to ease traffic congestion,

as a layperson, I believe improving our public transport system can be a viable option.

Trains bring in an air of nostalgia in many of us. It brings back childhood memories. The Uttara-Kamalapur train ride however has no romanticism attached to it. It is a hard reality for many. However, that does not have to be the case. Introducing a shuttle train between Uttara and Kamalapur will do marvels to ease the commute for a lot of people.

\$1b in budget support

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The conditions would “enable Bangladesh to enhance revenues, promote efficiency and transparency in public spending and public procurement, deepen the reforms of state-owned enterprises and help small businesses and microentrepreneurs to access low-interest affordable credits from the banking sector”, said Aminur Rahman, principal public management economist for ADB’s South Asia region.

With a strong focus on gender, climate change and digitisation, the conditions would also enable the government to strengthen its efforts to support income generation for the poor and vulnerable, he said in a press

release.

One of the major conditions is securing parliamentary approval to amend the Income Tax Ordinance, 1984.

Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal placed the Income Tax Bill 2023, which accommodated the lenders’ recommendations, in the parliament on June 8.

The draft was sent to the parliamentary standing committee for the finance ministry for scrutiny. The committee has been asked to submit its report within five working days.

Some of the contentious issues in the forthcoming income tax bill came at the lenders’ behest such as

the mandatory income tax return submission by any individual who has spent Tk 4 lakh abroad (excluding pilgrimage-related travels) in the previous income year.

Another condition is consolidating and revising the law on income taxes to address new and emerging issues such as base erosion and profit shifting by global internet-based entities, transfer pricing, derivative transactions in the capital market and thin capitalisation.

The government must also secure parliamentary approval to amend the Income Tax Ordinance, 1984 or issue SRO (as appropriate) for the withdrawal of selected income tax exemptions.

Enable improved tax compliance,

enhanced oversight over tax administration, ensure the integrity and accuracy of tax collections, and minimise tax avoidance through identifying discrepancies in respect of tax liabilities and payments of firms and businesses;

The National Board of Revenue will have to issue orders for information exchange between the large taxpayer units of VAT and income tax, introduce risk-based VAT audits and adopt a risk-based audit manual.

The revenue authority will also have to issue an order to expand the electronic deduction of income tax at source system in at least 6 more tax zones.

The revenue authority has also

mandated online payment of VAT amounts exceeding Tk 1 crore as per the ADB’s recommendations.

Online payment of income tax for amounts exceeding Tk 20 lakh and pilot online personal income tax return filing by taxpayers with income exceeding Tk 70 lakh are two more conditions.

The government has closed down loss-making sugar mills under the Bangladesh Sugar and Food Industries Corporation as per the lenders’ demand with the view to freeing up scarce public resources.

Facilitate streamlining of public procurement, strengthen professionalism in public procurement and enhance efficiency;

Another condition is securing cabinet approval for the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority bill for the establishment of an autonomous public procurement authority.

Transparency and efficiency in public procurement will be enhanced through strengthening electronic procurement and electronic payment systems, while approval of public projects will be facilitated through the newly launched digital system of public project appraisal and approval process, according to ADB.

If the policy actions are implemented sincerely, Bangladesh’s tax-to-GDP ratio will increase to 8.8 percent from 7.9 percent at present by December next year.

Jamaat regroup by stealth

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of associate members has now grown to 2.29 crore from 1.03 crore in 2008.

Asked about the party’s recent activities, Jamaat Naye-e-Ameer (deputy chief) Abdullah Md Taher told The Daily Star that they were not allowed to carry out political activities for over a decade.

“But we have continued our ‘dawati’ (invitational) activities secretly and will continue to do so,” he said.

About the spike in the number of its members, especially among the women, he said it is the result of their dawati activities. “Still, the number of men is much higher than that of women, but the increase in the number of women members is higher.”

Jamaat has faced myriad challenges since December 2008. Many of its leaders were also arrested in 2013-2015 when the BNP-Jamaat alliance staged a fierce anti-government movement.

However, it faced an existential crisis when most of its top brass were tried on war crimes charges at the International War Crimes Tribunal and executed.

Following the war crimes trial, five of its top leaders were hanged while three died in custody. Another two, who were sentenced to different jail terms, are serving their time at present.

According to Jamaat’s database,

around 1,850 Jamaat leaders are in jail as of March 31, while 15 Jamaat men were alleged victims of enforced disappearance. Around 294 Jamaat activists were killed in the last 12 years, the party claimed.

Established by the controversial Islamist scholar Abul Ala Moududi in 1941, Jamaat had been banned twice, in 1959 and 1964 in Pakistan, for its communal role.

During the Liberation War, the party had directly taken a stance against the country’s independence and carried out indiscriminate massacre of pro-Liberation forces and activists supporting the cause of independence.

The Al-Badr Bahini, an auxiliary force of the Pakistan army in 1971, played a key role in the killing of martyred intellectuals. Al-Badr consisted mainly of activists of Islami Chhatra Sangha, Jamaat’s student wing during the Liberation War.

In its verdict against former Jamaat ameer Ghulam Azam, the International Crimes Tribunal-I observed, “...Jamaat-e-Islami, as a political party under the leadership of accused Prof Ghulam Azam, intentionally functioned as a criminal organisation especially during the War of Liberation of Bangladesh in 1971.”

The party was banned again after

independence but was allowed back in politics during the rule of late president Ziaur Rahman. Justice seekers, and war crimes victims and their family members have long been demanding the trial of Jamaat as a party for its role in 1971.

According to Jamaat sources, the party never regretted or offered apology for its role in 1971. The issue of offering apology was discussed within the party in 2017, but no decision was made in this regard.

Jamaat’s assistant secretary general Barrister Abdur Razzaq resigned from the party in 2019, citing the party’s failure to apologise for its role in the Liberation War and bring reforms to its constitution.

The BNP allied with Jamaat in 1999 and formed a four-party alliance ahead of the 2001 national election. Later, the alliance formed government after a landslide victory in the election and Jamaat’s former Ameer and secretary general were made ministers in the Khaleda Zia-led government.

Using the state power, Jamaat then strengthened its organisational activities.

As the 2013-15 movement against the AL government was a failure and drew flak at home and abroad for its violent nature, the BNP and Jamaat had been very strategic in their relations.

However, the parties bridged the gap and got closer recently and agreed to wage a simultaneous movement to oust the government and materialise a polls-time caretaker administration.

In 2013, Jamaat’s registration as a political party was declared illegal by the High Court. Acting on the verdict, the Election Commission cancelled Jamaat’s registration in October 2018.

In last October, Bangladesh Development Party (BDP), which many believe is Jamaat-e-Islami in disguise, applied for registration with the EC.

According to some media reports, top leaders of BDP were involved with Jamaat. The general secretary of the party is a former leader of Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat.

Earlier this month, Amar Bangladesh Party, founded by some former leaders of Jamaat, also applied for registration as a political party.

Both the BDP and Amar Bangladesh, however, were denied registration.

Despite all the hurdles, the police intelligence report shows how the party has silently recovered over the past 15 years.

The party has adopted a dual policy regarding the upcoming national election, slated to be held towards the end of this year.

It has already prepared a primary list of candidates for all 300 constituencies and even potential ministers for 10 ministries. It will make the final decision considering the political situation, according to the report.

While selecting the candidates, Jamaat has preferred party men who are in various professions – businessmen, doctors, engineers, police and former bureaucrats.

People who are popular and have considerable influence in their areas have been selected.

The organisation has also started collecting election funds from its members. It wrote to all its units across the country, asking party members to pay extra for raising an election fund.

The organisation has adopted a unique strategy to increase voters in constituencies where it has a strong base. It has also mobilised its voters in towns.

Pro-Jamaat voters of the constituencies where the possibility of its win is slim will be migrated to its strongholds.

Jamaat is also trying to spread its wings abroad for broadening its organisational base, collecting new members and raising funds.

According to the police document, Jamaat sent letters last year to

different Muslim countries and Islamic organisations abroad, describing its current political situation in the country and branding the incumbent government “anti-Islam”.

The organisation wrote to the chairman of Muslim Brotherhood on December 8, the Malaysian prime minister on November 24, the chairman of The Welfare Party of Turkey on November 6, the president of The Felicity Party of Turkey on October 24, the Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on October 17 and the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman on September 30.

According to the document, as the organisation is running its activities under the banners of different organisations, and as it has no specific office now, Jamaat is conducting its political and organisational activities from rented houses.

It is also holding meetings, spreading its ideology and conducting its organisational activities through various types of religious gatherings, like Waz Mahfils, across the country.

Islami Chhatra Shibir, the student wing of Jamaat, mainly recruits activists and supporters for the organisation, persuading them to build an ideal and just Islamic society.

PM sends mangoes to Murmu, Modi

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sent mangoes as gifts to Indian President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a gesture of warm relations between Bangladesh and India.

Hasina also gifted mangoes to Sonia Gandhi, former president of Indian Congress, and other Indian dignitaries.

The prime minister of Bangladesh had also gifted mangoes to Indian dignitaries in the past as goodwill gesture, Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi said in a statement yesterday.

Besides, mangoes were also sent to the chief ministers of India’s Northeastern states including Meghalaya and Assam, and to West Bengal.

Cabinet committee recommends extending Eid holiday by one day

BSS, Dhaka

A cabinet committee yesterday recommended to the cabinet for extending the Eid-ul-Azha holiday by one day. Chairman of the Cabinet Committee on Law and Order and Liberation War Affairs Minister AKM Mozammel Haque made the recommendation during a meeting.

The committee suggested that the Eid vacation will start on June 27 instead of June 28.

BARISHAL CITY POLLS

Man held over attack on IAB mayor candidate

STAR REPORT

Police have detained a man for his alleged involvement in the attack on Muft Syed Faizul Karim, Islami Andolan Bangladesh-backed mayoral candidate in Barishal City Corporation election.

Members of Kotwali Police Station detained Mainul Islam Swapan, of ward 22, on Monday night, said police.

According to Barishal Metropolitan Police, Faizul Karim verbally complained to the BMP commissioner’s office that he was attacked while visiting Sabera Khatun Girls Secondary School in ward-87 of the city.

Salahuddin seeks to pull ‘defamatory’ statements

Files writ petition

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Football Federation President Kazi Md Salahuddin yesterday filed a writ petition with the High Court seeking its directive on the authorities concerned to remove “defamatory and untrue statements made against him” at some programmes of Ekattor TV from all the public domains where they have been published.

In the petition, he requested the HC to order the authorities to stop broadcasting such defamatory and false statements and to properly ensure the National Broadcasting Policy to this effect, Adv M Saufullah Mamun, a lawyer for the petitioner told The Daily Star.