

Bangladesh's economy has a dignified position now: PM

UNB, Geneva

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said Bangladesh now holds an economically dignified position in the world due to the continuation of democracy and stability in the country since 2009.

She was speaking at an event titled "New Economy and Society in Smart Bangladesh", organised by the World Economic Forum at its office in Geneva yesterday.

The PM's Speechwriter M Nazrul Islam briefed reporters after the event.

Hasina said that the country has made unprecedented improvements in various socio-economic indicators during the rule of the successive Awami League governments.

She said during the AL government, Bangladesh emerged as a developing country from the group of the least developed countries (LDCs).

The per capita income has increased to \$2,824 from \$543 in 2006, the poverty rate has declined from about 41.5 percent to about 18.7 percent and the extreme poverty rate has dropped to 5.6 percent from 25.5 percent, the PM added.

Hasina said the Covid-19 pandemic, the Russia-Ukraine war and the subsequent sanctions and counter-sanctions have put pressure on Bangladesh's economy.

She said that her government was trying to overcome this pressure.

BORDER KILLINGS

India promised cooperation

Says BGB chief

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Border Guard Bangladesh chief Maj Gen AKM Nazmul Hasan yesterday said the Indian home minister and home secretary assured cooperation in stopping border killings.

Maj Gen Nazmul said this yesterday after a four-day director general-level talks between the BGB and BSF in Delhi that concluded on Wednesday.

The BGB held a press conference at the BGB headquarters yesterday to brief journalists.

The BGB chief said, "Our first agenda at the talks was to stop border killing. I hope to get a positive result in this regard. After I took over, border killings have reduced."

At the DG-level talks, the BGB and BSF agreed to complete 10 suspended development projects with five each

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PHOTO: PRABIR DAS, COURTESY

FEED DOGGO FRIDAYS

Standing by stray animals

ASHLEY SHOPTORSHI SAMADDAR

A group of young, enthusiastic, and kind youngsters preparing to feed stray dogs near the capital's Dhanmondi Lake -- this is what I was welcomed to when I decided to join Feed Doggo Fridays on a fine summer morning earlier this month.

Fuelled by his profound love for animals, Shadman Ishrak, a 20-year-old preparing for his A' Levels back then, initiated the "Feed Doggo" project in September 2021. He realised the difficulties stray dogs would face during the tough times of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, due to certain difficulties, the team had to take a small pause from their cause in May 2022, only to return with a greater will this year in January.

Since its inception, the project has fed over 7,000 stray dogs and countless cats; even goats.

"Sometimes, we try feeding the crows and other such animals too as many of us believe they contribute a

lot to maintaining the city's ecological balance," said Ishrak.

The project is mainly run by a team of over 300 volunteers, aged between 13 and 27, who come together every Friday in Mohammadpur, Dhanmondi, and areas of Old Dhaka.

"Some of them are regulars while many try and make time on as many Fridays as possible. However, we see the faces being repeated frequently," mentioned Ishrak while serving a portion of the day's special to a group of three hungry strays near Dhanmondi Lake.

The project is self-funded with the volunteers contributing from their pockets. So far, the young team of animal lovers has contributed around Tk 50,000 to keep the project running.

"We don't want to run from door to door collecting cash. Rather, we try and save as much as we can and welcome anyone who's interested to serve our little friends," shared the founder.

Once the money is assembled, a group is assigned to set off to the

kitchen market while a few others start preparing for the cooking session. The team usually serves home-cooked rice and chicken, with just a pinch of salt and turmeric to ensure good health.

Starting around 9:00am every Friday, this young group spreads across different lanes of the aforementioned areas -- meeting, greeting, and finally dining with these neglected animals.

Anurag Biswas Koushik chose to join the cause after going through the trauma of losing a puppy to illness and has been a regular volunteer since the beginning.

"Feed Doggo Fridays has become a part of my life. The experience of meeting, interacting, and making friends with these animals is incredible. They teach me to be welcoming and humble while overlooking the negatives around me," said Koushik, the twenty-year-old volunteer who is preparing to join the fall session at the University of Alberta in Canada.

So far, the group of animal lovers has arranged around 50 Feed Doggo Fridays.

"We hope to see you all soon as I believe we need every set of hands we can find to help these animals," concluded Ishrak, as we parted ways near Dhanmondi 8 with smiles on our faces, and a sense of joy and contentment in my heart.



Shibir-run coaching centre evicted in Ctg

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Chattogram District Administration during a drive yesterday evicted a coaching centre run by Islami Chhatra Shibir on government land at Chawkbazar area in the port city.

A mobile court from Chattogram District Administration conducted the drive at Probaho Coaching Centre in Chawkbazar area near Parade Maidan around 11:00am, said Tauhidul Islam, senior assistant commissioner of Chattogram.

It was built up on a government khas land which was leased out to Azizur Rahman Islamic Research Institute in 2007, he told our Chattogram staff correspondent.

Breaching the conditions of the lease, the land was rented out to the coaching centre, he said.

Two killed in lightning strikes

UNB, Sunamganj

Two fishermen died after being struck by lightning in Chhatak and Dowarabazar upazilas of Sunamganj on Thursday.

The deceased were Md Ismail, 42, from Chhatak and Ameer Ali, 35, from Dowarabazar.

Ismail was struck by lightning while fishing in a waterbody near his house at Longipur village under Noarai union.

He was rushed to Chhatak Upazila Health Complex where physicians declared him dead, said Md Jakir Hossain, officer-in-charge of Chhatak Police Station.

Besides, Ameer sustained severe injuries when a lightning strike hit him while fishing at noon.

Dr Hassan Ahmad, a physician of Dowarabazar Health Complex, said Ameer was brought dead to the hospital.

WEST BANK RAID

Israeli army kills Palestinian

AFP, Nablus

Israeli forces shot dead a Palestinian fighter in the occupied West Bank yesterday, Palestinian officials said, as the army said it came under fire during an operation to demolish an apartment.

The Palestinian health ministry said in a statement that Khalil Yahya Anis, 20, was "killed by live occupation (Israeli) bullets in the head in Nablus".

An official at Nablus' Al Najah hospital told AFP that two others were injured in the overnight clashes which erupted when Israeli forces entered the city in the northern West Bank to demolish the home of an alleged attacker.

An AFP journalist saw a group of young men surveying the damage to the apartment after dawn yesterday. Twisted metal and piles of rubble littered the floor and a gaping hole was left in a wall.

A local Palestinian security official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, confirmed that Anis was a fighter, though he did not say with which group he was affiliated.

Another security source in Nablus told AFP that Anis was a resident of the city's Al-Ain refugee camp and belonged to Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas's Fatah movement.

Grabbing land, stealing fertiliser his forte?

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to sell their land at giveaway prices, said victims, requesting anonymity. A few of them did not get any money, they added.

Hamayet Ullah from the municipality alleged that Poton took away eight decimals of land that he and his three brothers owned.

"Before registration, Poton promised he'd give us Tk 24 lakh, but after registration, he offered us Tk 80,000, which we refused to accept," he told this newspaper over the phone.

In 2018, forty men and women of the Hindu community from the Khudraban area lodged a joint complaint against Poton with the then deputy commissioner of Narsingdi for grabbing their lands.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the complaint. Dated January 7, 2018, it states: "...we, the undersigned, are from Ward no 5 of the Ghorasal municipality in Narsingdi district ... We have been living in the Khudraban village for centuries. Activists working for lawmaker Kamrul Ashraf Khan Poton started erecting walls through our neighbourhood. When we tried to prevent them from grabbing our ancestral lands, we were told that the MP was in need of land. We were asked to leave our land for India."

Stressing that the undersigned have no intention to leave the country, the letter then begs the DC to protect their ancestral lands.

Requesting anonymity, seven out of the 40 complainants told this correspondent that they were forced to sell their lands at low prices. At least two of them left the country, they added.

They said the market value of per decimal land in Khudraban village was Tk 75,000 - Tk 80,000 in 2018, but the land owners got only Tk 40,000 to Tk 45,000.

Kanon Bala, whose son was one of the 40 complainants, said Poton's men started erecting a brick wall along the boundary of their 100-decimal homestead weeks after her husband Bimal Chandra had died in December 2017.

"We did not sell the land, nor did we take any money from Poton. Yet

his men raised around a 50-yard-long wall along the boundary of our house," said Kanon.

She could save the land because the government high-ups took notice of the incident, she added.

These correspondents saw marks of removed walls and pillars on Bimal's land during a visit there on April 4.

Contacted, Subhash Chandra Biswas, the then deputy commissioner of Narsingdi, said he recalls the complaint.

"After receiving such a complaint, I visited the area and before my visit, those who were erecting walls removed them," said Subhash who is now an additional secretary at the public administration ministry.

The Daily Star tried to contact Poton several times. Despite repeated attempts, he did not pick up the phone. This correspondent sent text messages to his mobile phone and Whatsapp number. He responded to neither.

MISAPPROPRIATION OF FERTILISER

Poton's interests go well beyond lands.

He is also the president of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association (BFA) and proprietor of M/S Poton Traders, a contracting firm.

His firm worked with the state-owned Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) for over a decade. Using his power as the BFA president, he won major contracts to transport imported fertiliser from Chattogram and Mongla ports to government warehouses, according to BCIC sources.

But things changed in December last year when two BCIC probe committees found out that Poton's firm was involved in a major fertiliser scam.

The BCIC filed a Tk 1,163 crore money suit against Poton and his firm, M/S Poton Traders, on charge of misappropriating 71,801 tonnes of imported chemical fertiliser.

Though the market price of the misappropriated fertiliser is Tk 582 crore, Poton and his firm should pay up double the price for the loss the BCIC incurred due to his failure to comply with the agreements, says the

case statement.

The suit was filed with the 5th Joint District Judge's Court on March 20. Meanwhile, The Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has also started an investigation over the scandal after a High Court bench issued a Suo Moto rule on January 5 and asked the ACC to submit a report after the probe.

The Daily Star has obtained copies of several letters that the BCIC sent to Poton Traders, urging the company to deliver the fertiliser.

In a letter dated October 31, 2022, the BCIC said that it signed 13 agreements with Poton Traders in the 2021-2022 fiscal year, which stipulated that from 13 ships Poton's firm would collect and transport 3.93 lakh tonnes of imported fertiliser from Chattogram and Mongla ports to different government warehouses across the country.

According to the letter, once cleared by the port authorities, the deadline for delivering bulk urea fertiliser was 50 days and for bagged urea 40 days. However, 3.21 lakh tonnes of fertiliser collected from six ships have so far been delivered in time. The deadline for delivering the last batch of the remaining 71,916 tonnes ended on 15 May, 2022.

On October 2, 2022, Poton Traders wrote to the BCIC mentioning a timeline for delivering the remaining fertiliser. In its letter, Poton's firm claimed that the fertiliser it had in its warehouses amounted to 66,222 tonnes.

As Poton's firm failed to deliver the fertiliser again within the deadline it itself set, the BCIC formed two probe committees who submitted their reports on December 8. After visiting Poton's warehouses, the probe body found that there were only 1,307.9 tonnes of fertiliser, which were substandard and couldn't be provided to the farmers.

Contacted, BCIC Chairman Md Saidur Rahman Khan said they have already filed a money suit against Poton Traders and its owner over the misappropriation of fertiliser.

Replying to another query, he said they have already debarred Poton Traders from tendering for the BCIC

and now the BCIC has no deal with him.

Another BCIC top official said they have provided the ACC with all the necessary documents for the investigation.

ACC Deputy Director Md Rafiquzzaman, who is leading a three-member team investigating the allegation against Poton Traders, said the investigation is going on.

"We hope to wrap up our investigation by the end of this month," he added.

Several attempts were made to reach out to Poton for his comments on this. When he did not pick up the calls or respond to text messages, The Daily Star called his personal secretary Kamrul Islam Kamal who assured that he would call back with Poton's comments but he did not.

Fertiliser thieves

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The HC bench set July 9 for further hearing on the rule and asked the BCIC lawyer to submit the report to the court by that date.

Khurshid Alam Khan, lawyer of the Anti-Corruption Commission, told the court that the commission would submit its probe report to the HC very soon.

On January 5, the HC bench directed the ACC and the BCIC to conduct enquiries into the allegation of misappropriating 72,000 tonnes of imported chemical fertilisers by Poton Traders, a contracting firm, and submit the probe reports to it. The government incurred a loss of Tk 582 crore for this misappropriation.

According to a report of Bangla daily Prothom Alo, Poton Traders has misappropriated 72,000 tonnes of imported chemical fertiliser without carrying those to warehouses after the consignment was released from the port.

Former lawmaker Kamrul Ashraf Khan (Poton), also the president of Bangladesh Fertiliser Association, is the owner of Poton Traders, the report said.

Hotter, drier summers

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days where temperatures in an area are five degrees Celsius above the daily average.

The Bangladesh Meteorological Department defines temperatures of 36 to 38 degrees Celsius as a mild heatwave, 38 to 40 as a moderate heatwave, and temperatures above 40 degrees Celsius as an intense heatwave.

Experts say that erratic rainfall, high temperatures, extensive areas under heatwaves and their frequency are the new worries for Bangladesh, one of the worst victims of global warming.

"Increased human activities both at the global, regional and local levels are responsible for the warming of the climate. In Bangladesh, the heatwave magnitude and frequency situation would become worse in future, especially in cities," Ashraf Dewan, professor at the School of Earth and Planetary Sciences of Curtin University, Australia said.

In Southeast Asia, April and May are usually the warmest months of the year.

Journalist beaten to death

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Nadim was taken to Bakshiganj Upazila Health Complex and later shifted to Jamalpur General Hospital. As his condition deteriorated, he was moved to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Shahidur Rahman, a doctor of Jamalpur General Hospital, said Nadim was hospitalised with serious head injuries.

Meantime, a video clip of the attack has gone viral.

Talking to this newspaper, Nadim's wife Monira Begum alleged that supporters of Chairman Mahmudul attacked Nadim.

"After the report was published against the chairman, he had been harassing Nadim. He killed my husband. I demand exemplary punishment to the killers," said Monira.

Contacted, Mahmudul rejected

the allegations and said he had no dispute with Nadim.

Mohammad Sohel Rana, officer-in-charge of Bakshiganj Police Station, said they have so far detained three people in connection with the killing.

Police are investigating it and the process of filing a case was underway, he added.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists, Dhaka Union of Journalists, Dhaka Reporters Unity and Broadcast Journalist Centre sought justice for the murder.

BFUJ and DUJ announced a protest rally in front of the Jatiya Press Club tomorrow.

In a statement, Kamal Uddin Ahmed, chairman of the National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh, demanded punishment to the killers.