

UK wants fair, violence-free polls here

Says UK high commission
DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The UK encourages free, fair, participatory, and peaceful elections so the people of Bangladesh can exercise their democratic rights, according to a statement issued by the UK high commission in Dhaka yesterday.

The statement also underlined the need to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms during the fifth UK-Bangladesh Strategic Dialogue held at the Foreign Service Academy (FSA) yesterday.

Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen led the Bangladesh side and UK Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office Sir Philip Barton led the UK side at the dialogue.

“Since they are our old friend and a development partner, they have an interest in our elections. We have reiterated our commitment [to holding fair polls]. We had a positive discussion,” Masud told reporters after the dialogue.

Responding to a query, he said the word participatory has many meanings.

“We have no disagreement over a free and fair election,” Masud said, adding that Bangladesh welcomes international observers for the upcoming election.

The UK reiterated its commitment towards Indo-Pacific region, while Bangladesh explained its recently-published Indo-Pacific Outlook, which speaks of a free and open Indo-Pacific. The UK and Bangladesh agreed to continue cooperation on global and regional security, according to the UK high commission statement.

The UK noted the need for improved livelihood provisions for the Rohingya, while reiterating its commitment to the goal of a safe, voluntary, and dignified return to Myanmar when the situation allows.

The UK announced a further £3m contribution to support the Rohingya, taking its total contribution since 2017 to £368m.

Sir Philip Barton said, “The dialogue is a reflection of the growing relationship between our two countries, and our desire to work together more closely on our economic, trade, and development partnerships and on regional and global security issues.”

Momen said the two countries agreed to sign Standard Operating Procedures to find ways to bring back the irregular Bangladeshis from the UK.



Florists have set up shop partially blocking the stairs to the footbridge next to Birdem Hospital in Shahbagh. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

23 hurt as pro-BNP lawyers, cops clash

Defying police restriction, they took out protest procession on Johnson Road in the capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 23 people were injured as pro-BNP lawyers and police clashed in front of Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judges’ Court in Old Dhaka yesterday.

Witnesses said the clash broke out around 12:30pm when the BNP-backed lawyers brought out a procession on Johnson Road, defying police restriction.

During the clash, seven members of the law enforcement agency, including DMP’s Kotwali Zone Additional Deputy Commissioner Muhit Kabir Sarneabat, Assistant Commissioner Shahinur Islam and Officer-in-Charge Shahinur Islam of Kotwali Police Station, and 16 pro-BNP lawyers were wounded, according to police and BNP sources.

The injured BNP lawyers were taken to Dhaka National Medical Institute Hospital and Islami Bank Central Hospital in Kakrail, while the police personnel took treatment at Central Police Hospital in Rajarbagh.

“We brought out a peaceful procession, demanding voting rights and restoration of democracy and the caretaker government system, but police suddenly attacked us,” said BNP Law Secretary Kayser Kamal.

“This brutal attack by police is an attack on democracy, on our constitutional rights and it a clear violation of people’s legal rights,” added the Supreme Court lawyer.

Contacted, ADC Muhit said, “We requested the lawyers to bring out the procession inside the court premises, but they occupied the busy streets. So, we removed them from there.”

“We didn’t attack any lawyers. We just drove them away from the streets. The lawyers attacked us,” he added.

All ongoing manual land surveys cancelled

Says land minister; JS passes Land Crime Prevention and Remedy Bill-2023

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Land Minister Saifuzzaman Chowdhury has said the government has cancelled all the ongoing land surveys which have been carried out following the old method.

“All land surveys that have already been conducted are cancelled. I want to confirm this standing in parliament,” he told the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday.

The minister, however, said that the digital land survey will continue.

Saifuzzaman was speaking in parliament before the passage of Land Crime Prevention and Remedy Bill-2023. The law has been enacted aiming to curb land-related forgeries and offences.

The bill, which was placed before the House by the land minister for passage, was passed by a voice vote.

Taking part in the discussion before the passage of the bill, some opposition MPs blasted the authorities concerned for irregularities in the ongoing land surveys.

The minister said, “I have also received some complaints recently. Our objective is to follow the Bangladesh Digital Survey. We have started using the digital survey method. A pilot project has been taken up in Patuakhali and Barguna. Surveys are being conducted at some places.”

Saifuzzaman mentioned that he received some complaints even from his constituency (Chattogram-13) in Anwara upazila.

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NBR transfers 270 customs officials

UNB, Dhaka

The National Board of Revenue (NBR) has made a major reshuffle in the customs department by transferring 270 officials, including 268 assistant revenue officers of the customs, excise, and VAT departments and two joint commissioners.

Three separate notifications were issued in this regard on Sunday and Monday.

NBR’s Public Relations Officer Syed A Mumen told UNB yesterday that this initiative has been taken by NBR to bring dynamism to the revenue sector.

The transfer order has asked the officials transferred to join their new workplaces between September 14 and 17, he said.

The two transferred joint commissioners are Abdur Rashid Mia and Mahbub Hasan. Abdur Rashid Mia has been transferred from Benapole to Dhaka and Mahbub Hasan from Chattogram to Rajshahi.

2 jailed for life in rape case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A Narayanganj court yesterday sentenced two men to life imprisonment in a case filed over the kidnapping and later gangraping of an 11-year-old child in Ruppaganj upazila six years ago.

The convicts, Mishon, 38, and Rubel, 28, were also fined Tk 1 lakh each, in default of which, they’ll have to spend an additional three months behind bars, said Public Prosecutor Rakibuddin Ahmed.

Three others were acquitted in this case, he added. Judge Nazmul Haque Shyamal of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal announced the verdict in presence of the convicts.

On January 17, 2017, the girl was abducted on her way to her brother’s house and later raped. Her hanging body was recovered from Mishon’s house.

The girl’s family allegedly couldn’t file a rape case immediately out of pressure from local influential, and an unnatural death case was filed instead.

On February 8, the same year, the girl’s mother was finally able to file a case with the court.

Ex-BCL leader arrested over torture, extortion

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bogura

Police arrested a former Chhatra League leader over allegations of carrying out torture and extortion at the Institute of Health Technology (IHT) in Bogura.

Shojol Gosh, 33, former organisational secretary of district unit BCL, was arrested yesterday morning, 10 days after a case was filed against him, said Bogura Sadar Police Station Officer-in-Charge Saihan Oliullah.

IHT students had been protesting since August 29, demanding Shojol’s arrest. They gave police a 24-hour ultimatum for his arrest on Sunday.

On September 2, Shahriar Hasan, a student at this institution, filed a case against Shojol on charges of extortion, misappropriation of hostel meal funds, and torturing students.

The complaint stated that Shojol used political dominance to illegally occupy room 218 of the IHT hostel and used to consume narcotics with outsiders there.

He also used to force students to press his feet, send them out in the middle of the night to buy cigarettes, and beat and extort students, it also read.

Janata’s great leniency to an errant client

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The Bangladesh Bank ordered Janata to conduct a functional audit and take legal action against those involved in the scam.

Janata got around to appointing the audit firm only in July – five years after the BB directive.

Md Abdul Jabbar, Janata’s managing director and chief executive officer from April, declined The Daily Star’s request for comment.

“If we suspend the facility, then it would not bring any positive things for both the client and the bank because we need to recover the loans,” SM Mahfuzur Rahman, chairman of the Janata Bank board, told The Daily Star.

Rahman joined the bank as its chairman in July 2020.

The bank has already recovered a small amount of the group’s loans as a down payment when extending the interest waiver, he said.

“There is a provision to waive interest subject to the recovery of cost of funds. This is a standard practice used for recovering bad loans,” he added.

When the interest waiver facility is

extended, clients are given a year to clear the liabilities, according to Md Younus (Badal), managing director and chairman of AnonTex Group.

“But we were given six months. By that reasoning, the time extension by the Janata board is fair. We contacted some other banks and they are willing to take over the loans from Janata,” he told The Daily Star.

Younus said his factories are running in full swing.

“In the last 10 years, we received working capital loans for only four companies and the remaining 18 companies did not get any working capital loan facility. That is why we faced trouble repaying the bank loans.”

AnonTex has mortgaged adequate land against the loans, he said.

Asked about the allegations of forgery and irregularities found by the 2018 central bank investigation, Younus said: “Forgery has not been proven yet.”

Industry insiders, however, said such loan irregularities are one of the key factors behind the ailing financial health of Janata, which has a capital shortfall of Tk 2,389 crore at the end

of March.

Once a reputed state-run commercial bank, Janata’s financial health took a turn for the worse centring on loan scams of AnonTex and Crescent Group.

At the end of 2017, the bank’s bad loans stood at Tk 5,818 crore. At the end of March, it was Tk 14,950 crore, which is about 11.4 percent of the banking sector’s total defaulted loans at the end of March.

The lender is now facing a liquidity shortage due to lacklustre loan recovery, said its top officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal.

“Janata Bank has become an ailing financial institution due to lack of accountability and impunity,” said Salehuddin Ahmed, a former BB governor.

The bank’s board of directors and management committee are largely liable for the present situation of the bank, he said.

“It is very sad news that the bank’s authority did not punish those who were involved in the AnonTex loan irregularities,” he said.

December 2012 to September 2015. He was elevated to the Appellate Division on September 3, 2020.

Justice Obaidul Hassan has written several books including “Bangabandhu, Rabindranath O Osamprodayeek Bangladesh”, “Bangabandhu Bangladesh: Ekjon Juddhoshishur Golpo O Onyanya,” and “Obornoneeyo Nirmomotar Chitro,” the SC sources said.

Supreme Court Bar Association Secretary Md Abdun Nur Dulal congratulated Justice Obaidul as the new chief justice.

“Justice Obaidul Hassan is a man of commitment and profound personality. He is an honest man. He made a huge contribution to our legal system when he was a lawyer,” he said.

Chief Justice Hassan Foez Siddique was accorded farewell on August 31 as the last regular judicial functions of the SC took place on that day before the court went on annual vacation.

10 firms, bodies accused of market manipulation

FROM PAGE 1

He said the cases were filed under section 15 of the Competition Act, 2012, and the companies will be issued notices today or tomorrow to respond in 15 days.

A senior official of the commission said if found guilty, the companies could be fined up to 10 percent of their three-year average turnover.

Section 15 of the Competition Act says that no person shall directly or indirectly enter into any agreement or collusion – in respect of production, supply, distribution, storage or acquisition of any goods or services – which causes or is likely to cause an adverse effect on competition or creates monopoly or oligopoly in the market.

In mid-August, the price of a dozen farmed brown eggs shot up to Tk 180 from Tk 145, putting many people who rely on the cheapest source of animal protein in trouble.

The BCC, following instructions by the commerce ministry, formed several committees to probe the reasons behind the unusual price hikes.

Prices of broiler chicken, the cheapest source of meat, had also gone up then.

On August 13, Fisheries and Livestock Minister SM Rezaul Karim said the cost of producing an egg in the country was about Tk 10.50. “If it is sold at the retail for Tk 12, then everyone will make a profit,” he told reporters.

The prices eventually dropped after the Directorate of National Consumers Right Protection raided markets to bust egg hoarders.

Yesterday, a dozen eggs were being sold for Tk 150, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh. Egg prices have increased 18.39 percent in a year, the TCB says.

Kazi Zahin Hasan, director of Kazi Farms Group, said Kazi Farms is not involved in any cartel or “syndicate” to increase the price of eggs. When the price of eggs goes up, people jump to the conclusion that large companies have formed a cartel, he said.

He said hundreds of traders buy and sell eggs every day and they will obviously buy from whoever offers them a low price. “If Kazi Farms tries

to sell at a higher price than small farmers, the traders will buy from the small farmers and not from us.

“Over the last year, many egg farmers stopped producing eggs because the cost of feed was high and they were selling eggs at a loss. This has resulted in reduced supply.

“The hot summer further reduced egg production and reduced supply. The price of fish recently increased, leading many consumers to buy eggs instead of fish.”

Nazrul Islam Liton, general manager of People’s Poultry and Hatchery Ltd, claimed that the allegations against his company were false.

He cited poor production and high poultry feed prices for the price hike of eggs.

United Egg Sale Point owner Khandaker Md Mohsin, also secretary general of the Bangladesh Poultry Industries Association, said the allegations of the BCC are not logical.

He said over 60,000 poultry farms have closed over the last three years causing a supply dearth. The prices also went up due to high feed prices.

On top of this, heatwaves this year killed layer chickens in many farms across the country, he added.

Amjad Hossain Bokul, a member of the Poultry Professionals Bangladesh, said their main function is to advise farmers on managing their farms in a scientific way.

He said their organisation is a knowledge-sharing platform that connects poultry producers, feed producers, livestock science students, researchers, teachers, and livestock sector stakeholders. They are not responsible for the recent increase in egg prices, he claimed.

The Daily Star could not reach Kayser Ahmed, managing director of Diamond Egg Ltd and Moshior Rahman, managing director of Paragon Group, for comments despite repeated attempts via phone and texts.

Ghulam Rahman, president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said last year the BCC filed several cases against several companies and organisations for allegedly hiking the prices of essentials, including eggs and

broiler chickens, but there has been no outcome.

If the cases are not disposed of quickly and the culprits go unpunished, it will not be possible to stop price gouging and the consumers will continue to suffer.

He expressed hope that this time the commission will hear the cases quickly and take legal action.

In September last year, the BCC filed 44 cases against a host of individuals and organisations, accusing them of creating an artificial crisis that led to abnormal hike in the prices of items like rice, flour, eggs, poultry and toiletries.

Kazi Farms, Paragon Poultry Ltd were also among those sued. The cases are currently being heard by the commission.

Jamalpur DC

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Madarganj municipality, chaired the function where Md Kamruzzaman, superintendent of Jamalpur police, and several other AL leaders also spoke.

Last month, Shyamal Chandra Dhar, officer-in-charge of Dewanganj Model Police Station in the district, was withdrawn for seeking votes for “boat”, AL’s electoral symbol, in the upcoming general election.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Public Administration Farhad Hossain yesterday said the DC’s statements were inappropriate in the lead-up to the upcoming election, reports UNB.

“We will thoroughly investigate the DC’s comments regarding the election. It is inappropriate for a DC to make such declarations with elections on the horizon, these officials receive training to uphold neutrality,” said the minister while talking to reporters at the Secretariat.

“Nevertheless, it is essential to ascertain whether the speech was manipulated or distorted and subsequently propagated. In this era of artificial intelligence, speeches can be tampered with. The government will initiate appropriate action upon a comprehensive examination of the DC’s statement, should it be found to be genuine,” he added.