

## PM reiterates commitment to holding fair polls

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday reiterated her commitment to holding the upcoming general election in a free and fair manner as visiting State Secretary for International Development Cooperation at the Swedish Foreign Ministry Diana Janse called on her at her office.

The Swedish state secretary also said her country wants to see a free, fair, and inclusive election in Bangladesh, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told a press briefing after the meeting.

At the meeting, both leaders expressed satisfaction over the excellent relations between Bangladesh and Sweden.

Hasina said the Ukraine-Russia war should be stopped, and the money saved from ending the war should be channelled towards the welfare of mankind.

"Sanctions should not be placed on the transportation of food grains," she said.

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The premier said inflation, commodity prices, and goods transportation costs have gone up due to the war and sanctions.

She, however, said Bangladesh did not have a food crisis as local agriculturists are playing a great role in increasing food production.

Meanwhile, the Swedish state secretary praised Hasina for sheltering over 1 million displaced Myanmar nationals and said her government wanted dignified repatriation of the refugees.

The Swedish state secretary also said the Matarbari deep sea port will be a game changer for the development of Bangladesh.



Diana Janse, state secretary for international development cooperation at the Swedish foreign ministry, calls on Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the latter's office in Dhaka yesterday.

PHOTO: BSS

## AFGHANISTAN QUAKE

# Rescuers search for survivors

Taliban put death toll at 2,400; Pakistan, Iran, China offer relief aid

REUTERS, HERAT

Rescue workers yesterday scrambled to pull out survivors, and the dead, from beneath the rubble two days after the northwestern city of Herat and its surroundings were struck by the deadliest earthquakes to rattle Afghanistan in years.

The Taliban administration said at least 2,400 people were killed and many more injured in the quakes, which were among the world's deadliest this year after tremors in Turkey and Syria, in which an estimated 50,000 people were killed.

Neighbours Pakistan and Iran have

offered to send rescue workers and humanitarian aid, while China's Red Cross Society offered cash relief aid. A technical team from Iran has arrived in the area, Mullah Janan Sayeeq, spokesman for the Ministry of Disaster Management, said during a press conference.

"I ask all countries, to help us in this crucial time," said Sayeeq. He said that rescue operations are ongoing, adding that people are still trapped under rubble in two villages and teams are working to pulled them out.

The spokesman of Herat's governor, Nissar Ahmad Elyias, told Reuters that more than a dozen villages around Herat

were also affected.

Many buildings in Herat city were relatively unaffected, but the mediaeval minarets of its famous mosques sustained some damage, photographs on social media showed.

"Many of our family members have been martyred, including one of my sons, and my other son is also injured," Herat resident Mir Ahmed told Reuters at a hospital that was treating many survivors. "Most of the people are under the rubble."

Hemmed in by mountains, Afghanistan has a history of strong earthquakes, many in the rugged Hindu Kush region bordering Pakistan.

## Khaleda Zia should be sent abroad

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Hospital, where the BNP chief is receiving treatment.

"Water has accumulated in madam's [Khaleda] stomach, the lungs are infected, and there is a slow bleeding in her stomach. She has received four bags of blood this time around. The condition is complex and difficult.

"Madam [Khaleda] has been taken to the CCU [coronary care unit] from the cabin. When is a patient taken to the CCU from the cabin? When the patient is critical and when there is every chance of collapse," he said.

FM Siddique, a member of the medical board, lamented that it is hard for them to take that a patient is gradually deteriorating before them when there is a cure for the disease. "Time has not run out yet."

He said the former prime minister

is not getting proper treatment and is receiving temporary fixes.

She needs an immediate liver transplant and the facilities for that are not available in Bangladesh, he said.

"As per the medical board's unanimous decision, I want to convey to all concerned that there's still time to treat her with transjugular intrahepatic portosystemic shunt (TIPS) and also to transplant her liver at any advanced multidisciplinary centre abroad. Perhaps, we still have this option to improve her condition," the doctor said.

He said TIPS was immediately needed to stop water from accumulating in her stomach and chest, and halt the internal bleeding. "TIPS is a life-saving procedure which is not available in Bangladesh."

Another medical board

member AKM Mohsin said liver transplantation cannot be done in Bangladesh due to the lack of required setup, equipment, and manpower. "One or two livers were experimentally transplanted here," he added.

On October 1, citing legal grounds, the government turned down the plea from Khaleda's family to allow her to go abroad for better treatment.

The 78-year-old is suffering from various ailments, including liver cirrhosis, arthritis, diabetes, kidney, lung, heart, and eye issues.

Since her conditional release in 2020, the BNP chief has been receiving treatment at the hospital under the medical board and at home.

On August 9, Khaleda was admitted to the Evercare Hospital after becoming seriously ill at her Gulshan home.

## Hold dialogues to avoid confrontation

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election-time government. Dhaka University Prof Robaet Ferdous said people fear that violence and bloodshed await.

Shujon Secretary Badiul Alam Majumdar said Bangladesh is going through a transition period and a dangerous time and that it was high time the parties sat for talks.

Former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumdar said dialogues for peace are held even during wars. "No dialogue is effective if the parties are uncompromising."

"The changeover after 1/11 [January 11, 2007] came following the lack of consensus among political parties," he added.

Justice MA Matin, a former judge of the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, said people panic every five years when the election nears. There should be a law on the transfer of power with provisions that the new

government cannot arrest and sue opposition leaders in the first year of the government's tenure, he said.

He said the joint declaration of three alliances that were then waging a movement against HM Ershad said all problems would be solved only through dialogue. "But politicians seem to have forgotten that."

Former BNP MP Harunur Rashid said every problem can be solved through dialogue. "If anyone says 'With whom we will sit for talks?' it means he or she is dodging the responsibility."

He said if the ruling party tried to hold a one-sided election, the crisis would deepen.

Nagarik Oilka Convener Mahmudur Rahman Manna said the atmosphere for dialogue does not exist and that the prime minister should quit.

AL MP Nahim Razzaq said, "We can't deny that it's a tough situation.

We need a solution. For that, we have to sacrifice something...."

He said that since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is leading the government, he is hopeful of a dialogue. Discussions are needed for a permanent solution, and if that happens, it would be a milestone.

Communist Party of Bangladesh General Secretary Ruhin Hossain Prince said the election system is broken and it has virtually turned into a selection system. Nepotism is widespread. "We need a complete overhaul of the system."

Among others, Chief Coordinator of Gono Sanghati Andolon Zonayed Saki, local governance expert Prof Tofail Ahmed, Socialist Party of Bangladesh Assistant General Secretary Razequzzaman Ratan, Revolutionary Workers Party of Bangladesh leader Akbar Khan, eight representatives of Shujan from eight divisions also spoke at the programme.

## Falling reserve, bad loans worrying

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restrictions on luxury goods, and set a priority as to what goods can be imported in the current situation, said Prof Rehman, a former member of the advisory council of the caretaker government in 1991.

"Will we bring eggs, food, or BMW cars? I do not see any ban on bringing BMW cars, though the duty is high on the vehicle. Time has come to tighten import restrictions further," he said.

**'DANGEROUS TERRITORY'**  
He also warned against bad loans, saying defaulted loan is a big problem for the banking sector, which began in the 1980s when two financial institutions sanctioned loans without analysing the business viability to create a capitalist society.

Later, the two institutions – Shilpa Bank and Shilpa Rin Sangstha – went bankrupt. Now, the entire banking system is plagued by the problem as banks allow rescheduling progressively, he said.

As a result of non-payments, poor people's money is accumulating in the hands of the rich, he noted.

"It is not only a matter of economic inefficiency; it is also a serious injustice," he said, adding that defaulted loans have already reached a "dangerous territory".

"Defaulted loan is now an in-built practice in the business model," he said, adding that bad loans continue to rise as businesspeople and people in politics are out to help each other for mutual benefits.

## FALLING REMITTANCES

The macroeconomic indicators were doing quite well for many years riding on high export earnings and remittance.

However, some indicators felt pressure in recent times as the Russia-Ukraine war escalated fuel and food prices on the international market, said Prof Rehman, also former director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

On the other hand, remittance earnings dropped although a large number of migrants went abroad in recent months.

"It is contradictory," he said, adding that the reason behind this contradiction is that remittance is coming to the country through hundi instead of the official channel.

This process facilitates money laundering, and the potential forex earnings are not adding to the reserve. Instead, they are accumulated outside the country and, subsequently, the local currency gets devalued.

However, unlike many other economists, he does not support the market-based exchange rates to address this.

"I do not agree with the opinion of market-based exchange rate," he said, citing examples of India and China that did not float their exchange rate.

**BAD DEALS FOR POWER**  
He appreciated the government's move to enhance power generation capacity, but said the distribution channel is still not up to the mark due to the absence of a comprehensive plan.

"Rental power plants were justified for a few years, but their existence for 15 years has created all the problems. The problem lies in the agreements that were made between the government and power suppliers in the private sector," he said.

The profitability was in-built for the private sector and the risk was borne by the government by giving them the assurance of buying power in the name of paying capacity charges, he noted.

As a result, many entrepreneurs with no experience in power generation secured contracts by using their political clout and built power plants, although the distribution system did not receive enough investments.

"The result is the government is paying capacity charges even without using any power," he said.

## Kiwis thump

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bowlers in the company of the in-form Ravindra, but ballooned a shorter one from Paul van Meekeren straight to De Leede at mid-on.

Ravindra, who hit a rapid century in the win over defending champions England, backed that effort up with a steady fifty but fell after reaching his milestone as he edged Van der Merwe off his legs to captain Scott Edwards.

Mitchell and skipper Latham kept the score ticking briskly but their dismissals slowed things down before Santner struck an unbeaten 36 from 17 deliveries as New Zealand plundered 50 runs from the last three overs.

## Ninth-grader hacked to death on her way to school

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A ninth grade schoolgirl was hacked to death by unidentified criminals in Mymensingh's Bhaluka upazila yesterday.

Rakia Sultana Riya, 14, daughter of Abdur Rashid from the upazila's Batajor area, was a student at Batajor BM High School.

A year ago, Riya got married to Ripon Mia, an expatriate worker living in Saudi Arabia, said Kamal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Bhaluka Police Station, quoting family.

"After a few days of their marriage, Ripon left for Saudi Arabia. After he left, his parents started abusing Riya mentally and physically, forcing her to return home. Since then, she had been staying at her father's house," the OC added.

Yesterday around noon, when Riya was going to school, criminals waylaid her and attacked her with sharp weapons, leaving her critically injured. She was taken to the Bhaluka Upazila Health Complex, where the doctors declared her dead. Informed, police sent her body to the Mymensingh Medical College Hospital morgue for an autopsy.

No case was lodged and no one was arrested as of writing this report in the evening. The victim's family points fingers at her in-laws for the killing, said the OC.

## 'Smuggler's' body found in river with 68 gold bars

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chuadanga

Border Guard Bangladesh yesterday recovered a suspected smuggler's body with 68 gold bars from Mathabhanga river near the border area of Chuadanga.

The deceased was identified as Miraz Hossain, 22, son of Yeasin Ali from Nastipur village in Darshana upazila.

BGB-6 came to know that two smugglers crossed the Mathabhanga river near border pillar 80/1-R with gold, about 25 yards inside Bangladesh, but one smuggler drowned in the water and the other smuggler got out of the river and managed to flee inside Bangladesh.

The BGB-6 team recovered the body from the river with 68 gold bars, according to a release.

The body will be handed over to the family after completing the legal procedure, added the release.

## Tigers calm

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head coach Chandika Hathurusingha and the duo was engaged in a long chat.

Bangladesh convincingly won their campaign opener against Afghanistan, but there is a possibility that they could opt for a different strategy against the defending champions today.

Having opted to field five specialist bowlers on Saturday, with Mahmudullah Riyad fitted to sneak in a few overs if needed, did not backfire. But against a vastly superior side in England, the think-tank would consider the safety net formed through an extra bowling option.

Hathurusingha was seen talking to Sheikh Mahedi Hasan ahead of yesterday's optional training session, and it won't be a surprise if the off-spinning all-rounder eventually makes the cut to the playing eleven.

The mood in the Tigers camp appears relaxed. Taskin Ahmed, Liton Das and Shoriful Islam opted to rest at the team hotel instead of partaking in training, while the likes of Tawhid Hridoy, Musfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah and Mahedi were seen batting at the nets against Hasan Mahmud, Tanzim Hasan Sakib, Nasum Ahmed and a few net bowlers.

Shakib, though, was present but remained an exception as the ace all-rounder skipped practice and was seen in a jovial mood, smiling and chatting with the coaches and the members of the team throughout the training session.

The Bangladesh skipper perhaps wanted to keep himself fresh before a high intensity match, and focus more on his tactical input to the think-tank. Shakib will certainly hope his troops repeat the tenacity and the overall body language which was on display against the Afghans.