

BNP looking for other ways to assume power

Says Hasina



BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said yesterday that the BNP did not participate in the January 7 election out of fear of defeat and has been searching for other ways to assume power after being rejected by the people time and again.

"They know they've been boycotted by the people. That's why they don't want to take part in the election. Now, they're searching for different ways to regain power by destroying the electoral process. They're looking for dark paths straying from the path of light, which is election," she said.

The prime minister made the remarks while addressing expatriate Awami League leaders and activists at the Gano Bhaban in the capital.

"They [BNP-Jamaat clique] are now demanding to scrap the election," she said.

Referring to the 2008 election, the premier said the BNP-Jamaat alliance got only 30 seats while AL alone bagged 233 seats.

"Since then, they don't want any elections. They've been torching buses, launches, and trains and burning people to death. The more they indulge in terrorism, the more the people reject them," she said.

The premier said the victory of the Awami League in the election was a victory for the people and democracy as well.

"I will work as a public servant, not as a prime minister, to change the fate of the people as a daughter of the Father of the Nation," she said.

"We will turn Bangladesh into a poverty-free prosperous nation by 2041..."

The prime minister recalled the contribution of the expatriates in each of the democratic and progressive movements and also in building the nation.

She said the expatriates played a great role in forming public opinion in favour of independent Bangladesh during the Liberation War in 1971.

"I thank you all, as the remittances you send to Bangladesh are the main driving force of our economy," she said.

The premier also urged all Bangladeshi expats to take part in the universal pension scheme to secure their future.

Is dating in this city an extravagant affair or a thrift-store bargain? This debate is as fun for singles as it is stressful for our dear romantic comrades. But is the picture as dismal as it appears?



DATING IN DHAKA An expensive love affair?

NUSRATH JAHAN

Struck by Cupid's bow, it is only natural that you want to whisk your special someone away on a romantic date every once in a while, and we know that if there is one thing that Dhaka does best, it is restaurants.

The question is, will you be savouring the Thai twists and indulging in the pasta passion of Italian cuisine or will your wallet need CPR?

Consider a coffee date in one of the pretty cafes of Dhaka—keeping it simple, you order two cups of coffee and perhaps two slices of your favourite dessert to go with it. This seemingly "simple" date will cost a little over a thousand takas, sometimes leaving you to wonder why khichuri is not the preferred meal for breakfast or brunch dates.



Looking at the main course at any regular, lunch or dinner place, a meal on average costs Tk 500-600 per person. Add two drinks and a dessert, and you have got yourself a total of roughly Tk 2,500. In short, Dhaka is the magical land that will give you a great dining experience with your partner, given that you pay for it.



PHOTO: SAZZAD IBNE SAYED

Let's now discuss the brave ones who choose to go on an explosive flavour-filled roadside date and street food hunting. This reasonably priced adventure could very easily become a spiced-up financial rollercoaster if you get a little carried away in the wonderland of fuchka, halim, and cheese momos!

Don't give up just yet, though.

Contrary to popular belief, love and money do sometimes live together in this pricey city. Romance and budget mingle in a park or along a lakeside stroll. The park bench becomes your reserved spot and the trees around you are the perfect backdrop to your perfect portrait. Ahh, the blissful affordability that does not break the bank!

Once upon a time, Gulshan and Banani were the self-proclaimed "posh date" zones, where a dinner date could cost you a kidney. The plot twist is as unpredictable as Dhaka's traffic—where Dhanmondi emerges as the dark horse, sharing the posh crown.

Love does not discriminate based on geographical location; it is willing to bloom in the posh lanes of Dhanmondi.

So, whether you are planning an exquisite date, testing your taste buds with street food, or opting for the serene walk in the park, remember that the cost of love in Dhaka is as fickle as the city's Wi-Fi. One moment, you are caught in a buffering financial conundrum and the next, you are streaming the romance of budget-friendly bliss.

In this theatrical performance of love, every date is an episode of an epic series with you as the main lead, and sometimes the most memorable acts come with a modest price tag.

So, in the grand theatrical production of Dhaka's love stories, here's to love, laughter, and the occasional malta-cha by the lake. May romance reign supreme in the streets of Dhaka, where the journey of hearts continues with a touch of humour, a dash of sarcasm, and a whole lot of heart emojis!



KUTUPALONG CAMP FIRE

EU releases €300,000 for Rohingyas

UNB, Dhaka

In response to the recent fire in one of the refugee camps, which hosts nearly 1 million Rohingya population in Cox's Bazar, the European Union has released €300,000 to assist the affected.

The incident left over 5,000 people without shelter.

The funding will serve to provide immediate emergency assistance to address the most urgent needs, notably in terms of shelter, water, and site development, said the EU Embassy in Dhaka yesterday.

In the early hours of January 7, a large fire broke out in one of the most congested camps, Camp 5, where it quickly spread. Close to 950 shelters burned down or were partially destroyed.

The fire also damaged communal facilities, including one health centre, and 15 learning centres, as well as numerous latrines and washrooms.

Despite the extensive damage, no casualties were reported, thanks to the rapid intervention of the fire brigade and the essential help of Rohingya community volunteers.

Since fires are frequent in congested camps, EU-funded disaster preparedness programmes have helped humanitarian partners strengthen camp structures and better prepare for such risks.

This new funding comes in addition to the over €38 million provided by the EU last year in humanitarian aid to Bangladesh, notably in response to the Rohingya refugee crisis but also to reduce the impact of natural hazards.

Last March, when another devastating fire caused substantial damage in Cox's Bazar camps, the EU released €1 million to assist the affected refugees.

Body of suspected Rohingya robber found

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

The body of a suspected Rohingya robber was recovered from the footsteps of a hill in the deep forest of Teknaf in Cox's Bazar yesterday evening.

Police recovered the body of Mohammad Rafique from South Alikhali hilly area under Hnila union around 5:00pm, confirmed Osman Goni, officer-in-charge of Teknaf Police Station.

He said the deceased was known as "Rafique Dacoi" in the area.

Rafique went missing on Friday and family members claimed that he was abducted by a criminal gang, said the OC.

Rafique, an accused in five cases, had been in hiding, the police official said.

Locals said Rafique used to abduct Rohingyas from the camps in Teknaf and held them captive in the hills and released them after ransom.

They claimed Rafique was killed in a gunfight between two groups of Rohingya robbers.

The body was sent to Cox's Bazar General Hospital for autopsy and legal procedure is underway, said the OC.

Schools to close

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severity of cold, the meteorologist said when the difference between the maximum and minimum temperature decreases, the severity of cold starts to increase.

Yesterday, the maximum temperature in Dhaka was 21.4 degrees Celsius, and the minimum was 13.8 degrees Celsius. This means the difference between the two temperatures is only 7.6 degrees Celsius. This is why a bone-chilling cold is felt in Dhaka, Jebunnesa said.

According to meteorological standards, temperatures between 8 and 10 degrees Celsius mean a mild cold wave, 6 to 8 degrees Celsius a moderate one, and below 6 degrees Celsius a severe cold wave.

Rickshaw puller Alamgir Hossain of Farmgate area said it was very difficult for him to pull a rickshaw, specially in the morning, due to the cold.

"When I pull a rickshaw, it keeps me warm. But I feel the biting cold when I wait for passengers," he said.

Kaikaus's plan

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travelled to Bangladesh before the election, and is scheduled to return to the US next week.

In December 2022, Kaikaus was appointed as the alternate executive director of the World Bank for three years. Kaikaus was a civil servant with 36 years' experience in policy-making and implementation at central and local levels.

Speculation is rife that the new government may pick Kaikaus for an important position related to economic policy-making.

The appointment or termination of the contract as alternate executive director of the World Bank must be endorsed by the head of the government. That means Kaikaus may be given bigger responsibility in the government, said officials aware of developments.

Public administration ministry sources say it has been three years since Kaikaus retired from government service. According to rules, a former government official cannot become a technocrat minister or state minister before three years of their retirement.



Supporters of the Movement for the Liberation of the Congo (MLC) party contest the results of the legislative elections in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of Congo yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Repayment to rise 63pc in three years

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The fund release for the mega projects such as the Dhaka Metro Rail, the Matarbari Coal Power Plant, and the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant has increased in recent times as their implementation has entered the final phase.

Besides, Bangladesh has received sizeable budgetary support in the last three years after development partners accelerated lending to help the economy make a turnaround from the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.

As a result, the loan repayment is rising.

The repayment of the principal amount begins after the maturity of the loans, whose tenure range from 20 years to 30 years. The interest servicing starts after the disbursement is made.

In the last 15 years, Russia, India and China have emerged as the main lenders for Bangladesh.

At present, the government's loan to Russia stands at about \$12 billion, borrowed for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant. The construction of one unit of the plant is expected to complete by this year while the other unit is expected to be ready by 2025.

The grace period for the loan ends in 2025-2026.

According to a finance ministry official, the government is now repaying interests against the loan. The interest payments amounted to \$330 million in fiscal 22-23.

The repayment for the principal amount will start in 2026-2027, with \$531 million expected to be repaid in that year. The amount will be \$519 million in 2027-2028 and \$507 million in 2028-2029.

After this, the annual repayment will decline gradually.

In the case of the loans from China, Bangladesh is repaying \$251 million per year. It will reach \$698 million in FY 26-27.

The finance ministry official said most of the government borrowings come from multilateral creditors and are based on concessional terms.

As per the International Monetary Fund (IMF), all but Bangladesh's one external debt indicators are below their thresholds under the most extreme shock, he said.

However, Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist at the World Bank's Dhaka office, said Bangladesh's foreign debt is still at a comfortable situation.

But there are some risks that are cited in the IMF's latest debt sustainability report.

According to the economist, if the country's export sector faces a major shock, the dollar liquidity will reduce. "Then, there could be some problems in debt servicing even if the debt remains low."

Another concern for Bangladesh is lower revenue mobilisation. The country has one of the lowest tax-to-GDP ratios in the world.

If the trend persists, debt repayment might appear as a burden because the government will be forced to cut expenses to mitigate debt repayment.

Hussain said in the case of future borrowing, the government should try to secure long-term loans at lower interest rates from multilateral lenders.

"For this, there has to be bankable projects."

If the government goes for commercial loans, the funds should be for the projects that will earn foreign exchanges directly, he said.

Landing at HSIA in fog now more difficult

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Shafiqul Azim, managing director and CEO of Biman Bangladesh Airlines, said, "Maintaining flight schedules has become a challenge. We are diverting flights. The authorities are doing this for our benefit. But if the regulator does not consult with the operator before making such a decision, then it will end up hurting our interest."

Group Captain Kamrul said the airlines were informed at least 10 days ahead and they are operating flights

accordingly.

"The number of diverted flights has not changed. Pilots decide whether they would land using RNP assistance when the visibility is 800 metres or divert," added Kamrul.

Asked why the work was being done in winter, he said such activities are based on schedules. After an ILS system is set up, an international organisation has to calibrate it and the International Civil Aviation Organization has to audit it. "These are all related and pre-scheduled."

Israel slowing aid delivery

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Ayman Safadi, Jordan's foreign minister, said Israel was placing many hurdles to the entry of aid into Gaza that were worsening the dire situation of its residents.

In comments made during a news conference with his Australian counterpart, Safadi said these obstacles resulted in only 10 percent of the total needs of more than two million Palestinians in Gaza under siege being covered.

Requiring Israel to agree to a time-bound, mandatory path to a two-state solution is key to future stability in Israel and the Palestinian territories, Qatar's prime minister said yesterday during the World Economic Forum (WEF) meeting in Davos.

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman al-Thani said the Palestinians must be the ones to decide if the Hamas movement that runs Gaza will continue to play a political role in the future.

In the occupied West Bank, Israeli forces arrested 35 Palestinians after conducting raids. In total, Israel has detained more than 5,800 Palestinians in the West Bank since October 7.

There was an air strike on an

evacuation centre in the Daraj neighbourhood in eastern Gaza City, another on a home along a major road that connects northern Gaza City with its southern neighbourhoods.

The Israeli military said yesterday its special forces had carried out a strike in the area of Aytash Shab in Lebanon.

"IDF special forces struck in order to remove a threat in the area of Aytash Shab in Lebanon," the military said. It did not say what kind of forces had struck nor where specifically they had operated.

The military also said its aircraft struck an anti-tank missile launcher in southern Lebanon that belonged to the Iranian-backed group Hezbollah.

In an interview in Davos yesterday, Norway's Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said a number of European states, "concerned" Arab countries and the United States are working on a concept for a unified Palestinian government that could attract reconstruction funds.

Norway was of the view that a unified Palestinian territory should be run by the Palestinian Authority, but "prefacing everything, it has to be what the Palestinians want", he added.