

British MPs arrive to explore trade opportunities

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

A five-member British cross-party parliamentary delegation yesterday arrived in Dhaka on a five-day visit to explore the scope for business and investment as well as deepen relationship with Bangladesh.

On the first day of their visit, they held a meeting with Foreign Minister Hasan Mahmud and discussed how the Bangladeshi diaspora in the UK can play a role in trade and development of Bangladesh.

"One of the objectives of their visit is to build a close relationship with the Bangladesh parliament," Mahmud told reporters after the meeting at the state guesthouse Padma yesterday.

This is the first parliamentary visit from the UK since the 12th general elections.

The delegation is led by Conservative Party MP Paul Scully, a former parliamentary under-secretary of state for tech and the digital economy.

It also comprises three labour MPs:

"We want to make sure that we are partners of Bangladesh in trade, development and peace -- rather than masters."

Virendra Sharma, the vice chair of Bangladesh All Party Parliamentary Group; Neil Coyle, member of Foreign Affairs Committee of the House of Commons; and Andrew Western.

Dominic Moffitt, senior parliamentary assistant at the House of Commons, Zillur Hussain MBE, chair of ZI Foundation and Ivelina Banyaliev, co-founder of ZI Foundation.

They are also scheduled to meet with Ahsanul Islam, the state minister for commerce, and business leaders followed by visit to a green apparel factory.

The delegation will also be travelling to Sylhet to visit some of leading charities established by the British Bangladeshis, Tungipara and the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Sharma said Bangladesh has been making significant economic progress.

"We want to make sure that we are partners of Bangladesh in trade, development and peace -- rather than masters."

There are half a million British-Bangladeshis who play a critical role in business and politics and they are eager to contribute to Bangladesh's development, he added.



Displaced Palestinians gather amid tents flooded by heavy rain, at a makeshift camp set up by people who fled their homes amid ongoing Israeli operation in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

ISRAEL'S ACCUSATION

Countries halt funding to UN agency in Gaza

South Gaza battles rage as heavy rain hits displaced people further north

REUTERS, London/Doha/Gaza

Britain, Italy and Finland yesterday became the latest countries to pause funding for the United Nations' refugee agency for Palestinians (UNRWA), following allegations its staff were involved in the October 7 attacks on Israel.

Set up to help refugees of the 1948 war at Israel's founding, UNRWA provides education, health and aid services to Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. It helps about two thirds of Gaza's 2.3 million population and has played a pivotal aid role during the current war.

The United States, Australia and Canada had already paused funding to the aid agency after Israel said 12 UNRWA employees were involved in the cross-border attack. The agency has opened an investigation into several employees severed ties with them.

The Palestinian foreign ministry criticised what it described as an Israeli campaign against UNRWA, and the Hamas group condemned the termination of employee contracts "based on information derived from the Zionist enemy."

The UK Foreign Office said it was temporarily pausing funding for UNRWA while the accusations were reviewed.

"The Italian government has suspended financing of the UNRWA after the atrocious attack on Israel on October 7," Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said on social media platform X.

Finland also said it suspended funding.

- 26,257 Palestinians killed
- Nearly 65,000 wounded since Oct 7
- 174 killed in 24 hours

Hussein al-Sheikh, head of the Palestinians' umbrella political body the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), said cutting support brought major political and relief risks.

"We call on countries that announced the cessation of their support for UNRWA to immediately reverse their decision," he said on X.

Meanwhile, Israel pressed ahead yesterday with its campaign against Hamas

in Gaza's Khan Younis, as bad weather hit displaced Palestinians seeking refuge further north in the battered enclave.

Residents reported heavy aerial and tank fire across Khan Younis, an area of southern Gaza that has become the focus of Israel's ground offensive against Hamas, and around two main hospitals there.

Hamas said its fighters fired an anti-tank missile against an Israeli tank in southwest Khan Younis.

The Israeli military said it killed at least 11 gunmen who were trying to plant explosives near troops and others firing rifles and rocket propelled grenades at soldiers in Khan Younis.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad group, allied with Hamas, said its fighters were engaging Israeli forces in the area and had fired rockets into Israel.

The Gaza Health Ministry said Israeli strikes hit in the vicinities of Al-Amal Hospital and the largest functioning medical facility in the south, Nasser Hospital.

The Israeli bombardment was compromising healthcare and endangering the lives of doctors, patients and displaced people, said ministry spokesman Ashraf Al-Qidra.

Body found stuffed inside suitcase

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

Police last morning discovered the body of an unidentified person inside a suitcase at a new bus terminal in Faridpur town's Goalchamot area.

The victim is a male presumed to be in his late 30s or early 40s, said police adding that the luggage was found locked and left abandoned near the entrance of the bus terminal, close to the Golden Line Paribahan bus counter.

Witnesses said they saw a woman wearing a burqa get off an autorickshaw in front of the bus terminal with the suitcase early in the morning.

At that time, three to four others who were on the three-wheeler helped her with her luggage. Later, she left the suitcase abandoned and did not return for hours.

The luggage drew the attention of the people there, and upon failing to locate the owner, they reported it to the police.

Faridpur's Kotwali Police Station Sub-Inspector (SI) Shamim Hossain said the victim's fingerprints will be used to identify him.

RMG worker beaten to death by co-worker

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A readymade garment worker was beaten to death allegedly by a co-worker just outside his factory in the capital's Dakshinkhan last morning.

Sajib, 17, from Kishoreganj, used to live with his family in the area.

The victim's colleague, Md Sabuj, said a worker named Mahin, 20, took Sajib outside the factory's front gate around 9:00am and beat him unconscious.

Sajib was first taken to Kuwait Bangladesh Friendship Government Hospital.

From there, he was shifted to Dhaka Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead around 11:30am, said Inspector Bacchu Mia, in charge of the DMCH police outpost.

Dakshinkhan Police OC Siddikur Rahman said Sajib was killed by a colleague due to a personal enmity. The police are trying to arrest the person involved with the murder.

Woman loses legs under train wheels

Granddaughter unharmed in her arms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

A woman lost her legs under the wheels of a train near the Arani Station in Rajshahi's Bagha upazila yesterday, while her four-year-old granddaughter, whom she was holding in her arms at the time, was miraculously unharmed.

Bulu Begum, 45, was struck by the train last morning when she was crossing the third rail track at the east side of the station with her granddaughter Rabeya, said Station Master Mosarraf Hossain.

Her right leg was amputated at the heel and her left leg at the knee when she was taken to the Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, said hospital staff.

Station Master Mosarraf said the Rohonpur-bound commuter train from Ishwardi hit Bulu on the station's third rail track, which trains did not usually use.

"The train was delayed and would reach the station half an hour late when two other intercity trains Bonolota Express and Silk City Express were also scheduled to cross the station. That's why the third track was used for the commuter train," he said.

Countrywide black flag march on Jan 30

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anti-government slogans. A large number of law enforcers were deployed across in those areas while armed vehicles, water cannons, and prison vans were stationed along the procession route.

The two-day black flag procession was the first programme the party held after the January 7 national election.

As per the announcement, the next black flag processions will be held across all metropolitans, thanas, districts, upazila and municipalities on January 30 -- the first session of the 12th parliament.

Addressing supporters, Gayeshwar said, "We should continue our programme on the street.... This government is not for the [Bangladeshi] people; it's for China, India, and Russia instead."

"The prime minister has managed to get validation [for her government's legitimacy] from foreigners. If the people of this country don't validate, there is no scope for the government to prove its legitimacy merely with the help of foreigners."

He added, "People can't eat properly twice a day. The government has financially ruined the country."

The BNP leader accused Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of "giving leadership to corrupt people."

Speaking at the rally, BNP standing committee member Abdul Moyeen Khan said they want to end the one-party rule as the people have never accepted it.

"Bangladesh has never been run from Delhi.... Our peaceful black flag demonstrations will continue until BNP and all parties can together restore democracy."

40pc crashes in Dhaka city happens at night: RSF

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The organisation prepared the statistics compiling media reports and its own sources, he said.

The country incurred losses amounting to Tk 16,910 crore due to the loss of earners caused by the crashes last year, it said, citing the International Road Assessment Program.

The amount lost could be 1.5 percent of the country's GDP if the number of victims and damage to properties were tallied properly, it added.

DHAKA DEADLY AT NIGHT

At least 243 people were killed and 336 injured in 297 crashes in Dhaka last year. Of the victims, 83.16 percent were men while the rest were women and children.

Of the crashes, 40.19 percent took place at night and 16.26 in the morning, 10.52 percent before dawn, 13.87 percent in the afternoon and the rest in the evening, it said.

Goods-laden vehicles were involved in 31.25 percent of the crashes, buses in 18.75 percent, motorbikes in 25 percent, cars in 6.25 percent, and other

vehicles in the rest of the accidents.

The organisation said trucks run inside the city at night due to lack of bypass roads.

Inadequate roads, operation of mechanised and non-mechanised vehicles, occupation of footpaths by vendors, recklessness among drivers due to congestion are responsible for the crashes, it said.

The organisation, however, said a greater number of people were killed in Chattogram city last year: 289 people were killed and 443 injured.

CHILD VICTIMS OF CRASHES

Among the 1,128 child victims, 532 (47.16 percent) were killed while crossing roads and 329 (29.16 percent) were either passengers or drivers of vehicles and 267 (23.67 percent) were on motorbikes, it said.

The highest 32.44 percent children became victims in the afternoon, 24.91 percent in the morning, and 22.69 percent in the evening.

Lack of awareness about safety, roads not being children friendly, unskilled drivers and lack of treatment facilities for child victims were the main reasons for the high number of

deaths, it said.

BIKES CAUSING MORE DEATHS

At least 2,487 people were killed and 1,943 were injured in 2,532 crashes involving motorcycles last year. Besides, 1,909 of the victims (75.39 percent) were aged between 14 and 45 years.

The riders were solely responsible for 36.21 percent of the accidents while drivers of buses and trucks were responsible for 51.21 percent of the crashes.

The organisation said 1,452 pedestrians were killed last year.

Saidur Rahman, executive director of the organisation, said although the number of deaths fell by 15.41 percent compared to 2022, the number of crashes rose by 1.2 percent.

Operations of a smaller number of trucks due to the a slowdown of the economy and some good initiatives taken by the authorities could be the reason behind the smaller number of deaths.

But the improvement may not be sustainable as the road transport sector did not see any systemic change, he added.

Wheels in motion for new road safety act

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The law, which came into force in November 2019 replacing the Motor Vehicles Ordinance-1983, mainly deals with the functions of the BRTA that included issuance of registration, fitness certificates for vehicles and licences to drivers.

Ilias Kanchan, chairman of Nirapad Sarak Chai, said safety campaigners demanded that the 2018 law be called road transport and safety act because the law should incorporate safety issues, but the government did not pay heed to them.

Issues like safe vehicles, pedestrian safety, speeding, post-crash management, and construction of safe roads are considered most important globally, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"These issues cannot be dealt with

by the Road Transport Act. That's why we have been demanding a new law incorporating all these issues," Kanchan said.

RTHD Secretary Amin also admitted that the existing law lacked some provisions to ensure road safety. That's why an initiative has been taken to enact a new law.

Asked why many sections of the existing law have not been properly implemented, Amin said the authorities were working to implement those. The secretary said the government will try to make sure the new law is enacted as soon as possible.

HOW WILL THE COMMITTEE WORK?

Committee chief Saiful Islam said the committee members will hold a series of meetings to prepare a "skeleton

of the draft law. Then they will hold meetings with the stakeholders and the ministries concerned.

The committee will also seek public opinion before finalising the draft.

Safety issues related to the drivers, passengers and pedestrians will be incorporated in the new law to reduce crashes, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

In 2022, the BRTA formed a committee to set speed limits for vehicles on all major roads in coordinated ways to reduce crashes and prepared a draft guideline for it, said a committee member wishing anonymity.

The committee in a recent meeting with the RTHD secretary decided to incorporate the speed management issue in the new act, he added.

Women labour force

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In recent years, non-farm activities in rural areas have increased, which opened up more opportunities for village women to get involved in income-generating activities.

In the last quarter of 2023, the tally of employed people increased by 70,000 year-on-year to 7.11 crore despite a significant decrease in agriculture.

In agriculture, the total employed workforce decreased by 15.8 lakh to 3.17 crore, but the employed workforce in the service sector increased by 11.9 lakh to 2.68 crore in December.

"It is hard to explain how employment has decreased in agriculture. We saw bumper Aman production that time while winter vegetable production was also in its peak season," Hussain said.

The agriculture ministry can conduct a study on how employment has decreased in such a situation, he added.

It'll impact Rohingya repatriation

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MPs at the State Guest House Padma.

The minister's comment comes at a time when the Myanmar military is losing control of vast areas in the country. Attacks by ethnic rebel have seen military posts captured, towns taken, and trade routes with China, India and Bangladesh affected, according to media reports.

The Arakan Army seized many junta bases, outposts and battalion headquarters across northern Rakhine and Chin State's Paletwa Township.

Asked if the events evolving in Myanmar would affect Rohingya repatriation, Hasan said, "This can have negative impact on Rohingya repatriation. We always sought support from the international community. If they put pressure, Myanmar will be forced to take back the Rohingyas."

Enquired if Bangladesh would

shelter more Rohingyas who might be displaced due to escalating conflicts in Rakhine, the minister said despite being a heavily populated country, Bangladesh have sheltered more than one million Rohingyas on humanitarian grounds. Some 35,000 children are born to Rohingya women in the camps every year, he added.

"They are creating various problems here, including for security and environment. Rohingya camps have become breeding grounds for fanaticism. Terrorist groups are trying to recruit members from there."

Hasan said Rohingya problem can be solved through addressing the internal problems in Myanmar.

The minister said he recently had a meeting with his Myanmar counterpart on the sidelines of the NAM summit in Uganda and that he was keeping contact with the Myanmar government and discussing the Rohingya repatriation.