

KL to work with Dhaka to address Rohingya crisis

Malaysia minister calls on Yunus in Cairo

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Malaysia is looking forward to strengthening its ties with Bangladesh, said Malaysian Higher Education Minister Zambry Anel Kadir yesterday.

According to the Chief Adviser's Press Wing, Kuala Lumpur is also willing to work with Dhaka to address the Rohingya crisis.

The Malaysian minister said these while paying a courtesy call on Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus at the St Regis Hotel in Cairo, Egypt's capital.

They discussed many issues, including the recruitment of Bangladeshis in Malaysia and the expansion of higher education ties, the release added.

Kadir also said Kuala Lumpur would continue to support Bangladesh's inclusion as a sectoral dialogue partner of Asean.



Chief Adviser Prof Muhammad Yunus arrives in Cairo to attend the D-8 summit. Egyptian Public Business Sector Minister Mohamed Shimi received him at Cairo International Airport yesterday.

PHOTO: PTD

Raped, tortured for 3 months, girl dies in Mymensingh

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

An eighth grader who was allegedly abducted, raped, and tortured for over three months, has succumbed to her injuries at her village home in Mymensingh's Nandail upazila.

The girl was a student at Bakchanda Fazil Madrasa in Nandail.

According to the girl's family, Hossain, 19, of the adjacent Kuchuri village used to tease the girl. As the girl refused his advances, he, also a tenth grader at a local madrasa, and his unidentified accomplices abducted the girl on June 1.

Over the next three months, Hossain repeatedly raped and tortured her keeping her at an unknown place, they added. She was tortured to the extent that her right eye was severely damaged.

On September 6, the girl, belonging to a poor family, was left adjacent to her house in a critical state.

The girl was first taken to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital for treatment. Later, she was referred to an eye hospital in Dhaka where the doctors removed the affected eye for the safety of the other.

She was later sent home where she died Tuesday.

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IMF to give \$645m in fourth tranche

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The SDR (Special Drawing Rights) is an international reserve asset created by the IMF to supplement the official reserves of its member countries.

If the IMF executive board approves the request for additional funds, its total loan package for Bangladesh will reach \$5.3 billion from the existing \$4.7 billion.

The formation of an interim government has "fostered a gradual return" to economic normalcy in Bangladesh, the statement said.

Economic activity in Bangladesh has slowed significantly and inflation remains elevated. Capital outflows, particularly from the banking sector, have put pressure on foreign exchange reserves.

Additionally, tax revenues have declined, while spending pressures have increased, it pointed out.

"These challenges are further exacerbated by stress in parts of the financial sector."

Real GDP growth is projected to slow to 3.8 percent in fiscal 2024-25 due to output losses caused by the public uprising, floods and tighter policies but is expected to rebound to 6.7 percent in fiscal 2025-26 as policies relax.

Inflation is anticipated to hover around 11 percent (annual average year-on-year) this fiscal year before declining to 5 percent next fiscal year, supported

by tighter policies and easing supply pressures.

"However, the outlook remains highly uncertain, with risks skewed to the downside. To address the emerging external financing gap and persistently high inflation, near-term policy tightening is crucial."

Fiscal consolidation should prioritise the swift implementation of additional revenue measures, such as removing tax exemptions while restraining non-essential spending.

Coupled with monetary tightening, greater exchange rate flexibility and safeguarding foreign exchange reserve buffers will strengthen the economy's resilience to external shocks.

Bangladesh's low tax-to-GDP ratio calls for urgent tax reforms to establish a fairer, more transparent system, focusing on rationalising exemptions, improving compliance and separating tax policy from administration.

A comprehensive strategy is also needed to curb subsidy spending and address arrears in the electricity and fertiliser sectors, the statement said.

"Addressing vulnerabilities in the banking sector is essential."

Immediate priorities include accurately assessing defaulted loans, ensuring the effective implementation of existing regulations and formulating a roadmap for financial

sector restructuring, it said.

Key actions involve conducting an asset quality review and adopting a recovery and resolution framework aligned with global standards.

Simultaneously, the authorities should advance risk-based supervision, while legal reforms are needed to strengthen corporate governance and regulatory frameworks.

"Institutional reforms to enhance the Bangladesh Bank's independence and governance will be critical for the successful implementation of financial sector reforms."

Enhancing governance, along with greater transparency, is critical to improving the investment climate, attracting foreign direct investment and diversifying exports beyond the garment sector, the statement said.

Furthermore, building resilience to climate change is vital to reduce macroeconomic and fiscal vulnerabilities.

Strengthening institutional capacity and optimising spending efficiency will aid in achieving climate goals.

The government should focus on implementing climate-sensitive fiscal reforms and investing in sustainable, resilient infrastructure.

Furthermore, robust management of climate-related risks will reinforce the stability of the financial sector, it added.

4 killed in clash over control of Ijtema ground

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Officials said the two factions blamed each other for the violence.

Against this backdrop, Dhaka Metropolitan Police imposed a ban from 2:00pm onwards on all forms of gatherings, processions, and rallies in Kamarpara, Abdullahpur, Uttara Sector-10, and the areas along the banks of the Turag.

Border guards and army personnel have been deployed in the area.

Zubair's supporters said Saad followers attacked them with knives, hammers, and cricket stumps after 3:00am when they were fast asleep.

Saad followers, on the other hand, told reporters that while they were preparing to go to sleep in their tents by the road between Kamarpara and Sluice Gate, Zubair's men attacked them around 3:30am.

Teams of law enforcers have also been deployed near Kakrail Masjid, the headquarters of Zubair-faction in the capital.

HOW THE CLASH ERUPTED

According to locals, Saad followers were trying to enter the Ijtema ground to hold a five-day "Jor-Ijtema" from December 20.

As Zubair followers were already there, Saad followers failed to enter the field. And stayed outside. After 3:00am, hundreds of devotees crossed the Kamarpara Bridge and entered the Ijtema ground. Zubair followers then tried to stop them, leading to a clash, said locals.

Locals and witnesses said Zubair supporters threw brick chunks at Saad followers who retaliated.

For almost an hour, the groups hurled bricks and stones at each other. Saad followers eventually forced Zubair's men to leave.

In a video message around 4:30am, Muaz bin Noor, who is known as a

Saad supporter, said, "We are now in control of the Ijtema Maidan. One of our brothers has been martyred in an attack by Zubair followers."

Officials identified three of the deceased as Aminul Islam Bachchu, 70, of Kishoreganj; Taizul Islam, 65, of Bogura; and Belal Hossain, 60, of Dhaka. They could not identify the other victim as of filing this report at 12:30am today.

At least 40 injured individuals were treated at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, according to sources.

After meeting the home adviser, Mamunul Haque, secretary general of Khelafat Majlish and a follower of Zubair, told reporters, "Zubair's supporters do not want chaos. Many have termed it a clash between the two factions. But it's not. Rather, Saad's men inflicted casualties on us. Those involved in the murders should be arrested by today. There is video footage of those involved."

In 2017, a rift developed between the leaders of Tabligh Jamaat, the organiser of the Biswa Ijtema. Factions of Zubair, based in Kakrail Masjid, and Saad, who is from India, later organised Ijtema in two phases.

The feud came to light in November 2017 when two factions clashed at Kakrail. The following year, there was a clash between the two factions over gaining control of the Kakrail Masjid.

In July 2018, late Hefazat-e-Islam leader Ahmad Shafi, popularly known as Maulana Shafi, formally extended support to the Zubair faction.

MEETINGS AT SECRETARIAT

Home Adviser Jahangir held separate meetings with leaders of both groups.

Reza Arif and several others from Saad group, held a nearly one and a half hours long meeting with the adviser starting at 11:00am. Advisers

of the ministries of land, industries, information, and religious affairs, and special assistant to the chief adviser on defence and national integration development, and special assistant to the home adviser attended the meeting.

After the meeting, Reza said, "Of course, we, as Muslims and citizens of the country, regret what happened. A fight between Muslims and Muslims is not right. We sincerely apologise. I request my fellow devotees to leave the [Ijtema] ground."

He added that the advisers requested the leaders to vacate the ground to prevent further escalation of tension.

"We decided to leave the place so that no more problems arise," he said.

He expressed hope that Zubair's men would also leave the ground.

"We will make every effort necessary to ensure no such incident happens in the future."

Later in the day, the advisers held a meeting with Zubair followers led by Mamunul Haque.

After 2:30pm, Mamunul along with the home adviser addressed the media.

He described Saad followers as terrorists and demanded a ban on their activities.

Mamunul said, "The Ijtema of the Zubair followers will definitely be held. But there is no scope for Saad followers to hold Ijtema."

The home adviser said if the two sides solve the problems through talks, then the Saad followers would be able to participate in Ijtema.

The government has not cancelled the date of Ijtema, he said, adding "Let them discuss."

The adviser further said that the attackers would face justice. "There is no scope to spare killers under any circumstances."

Admin getting even heavier at the top

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officials. And now this government has promoted another 131 officers who have been deemed deprived during the previous regime, bringing the total to 467.

The picture is very similar when it comes to the 250 posts for joint secretaries. During the previous regime 650 officials held these positions and now the interim government has promoted 226 more, making the total 861.

It is the same in the case of deputy secretaries -- 450 posts, 1,450 officials during the previous government and now there are 1,599.

After the previous regime was toppled, officials previously deprived had hoped that they would get promoted. Which has happened, but it has created the new problem of top-heavy administration.

Abdul Awal Mazumder, a retired secretary, told this paper, "It'll take years to fix this imbalance in the civil administration that was caused by too many promotions."

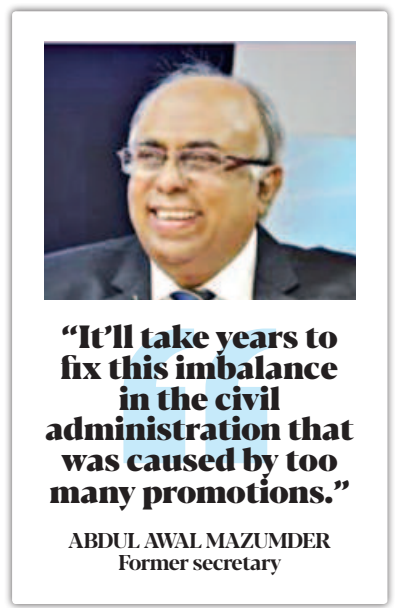
"Provided that the person is qualified and there is a vacancy, only then that person should be promoted. If this can be done, the balance could be protected."

When asked for comments, former secretary and NBR Chairman Badiur Rahman told The Daily Star, "The practice of rewarding party loyalists with promotions became a bad tradition under the previous government. However, it is unclear from what perspective the current government has decided on these mass promotions."

He further stated, "The government could have promoted qualified officers who were previously deprived due to political reasons. Instead, like the previous administration, this government has also promoted en masse, putting unqualified individuals on par with deserving ones. This diminishes the respect for truly competent officers."

Senior Secretary to the Ministry of Public Administration Mokhesur Rahman, said, "It is true that there are more officials than required in some higher positions. We are also addressing the cases of those who were deprived during the autocratic government."

Regarding irregularities, he said, "Before I took charge, there were some



"It'll take years to fix this imbalance in the civil administration that was caused by too many promotions."

ABDUL AWAL MAZUMDER
Former secretary

irregularities in promotions. However, no convicted officer will be promoted in future."

Siraz Uddin Miah, principal secretary to the chief adviser and the second-highest official in the administration, came down heavily on civil administration officials.

During an event organised by the Bangladesh Administrative Service Association at Dhaka's Biam Auditorium on November 16, he said, "With regret, I must say that since taking charge, I have received complaints from officers at various levels about personal grievances and dissatisfaction, but no proposals considering the bigger perspective."

Currently, there are 26 cadres in the public administration.

Among them, administration, foreign affairs, and police cadre officers get supernumerary promotions, which is promotions without vacant posts.

Most of these promotions are made in the administration cadre.

Officials of agriculture, health, education, information, roads, and railways only receive promotions when posts are vacant.

Now, officials of these cadres want what the administration cadres have been getting, promotions even if there are no vacant posts.

Omar Faruq Dewan, coordinator

of officers of 25 cadres, except admin, seeking benefits similar to that of the administration cadre, told The Daily Star, "The officers who joined alongside us in the administration cadre are receiving promotions even without vacancies on top of better benefits. Why should we be left out?"

"We also want regular promotions against vacancies, but this must be done equally across all cadres."

PROMOTION OF GUILTY OFFICIALS

Prof Siddiqui Rahman, a former director of Dhaka University's Institute of Education and Research and a member of the 2010 Education Policy Formulation Committee, said it was "unfortunate" that their recommendations have remained "unimplemented."

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ministry is likely to send the names of members of the new education policy commission to the Chief Adviser's Office within two to three working days.

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"The 2010 education policy had some good recommendations for the betterment of education in the country. The new education policy framers can

have a look at it and if they find these good, they can take it," he said while speaking to this newspaper.

Rasheda K Choudhury, executive director of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), hoped that the members of the new commission would emphasise modernising and increasing the quality of education.

They should recommend measures to control growing discrimination in education, she said while speaking to The Daily Star.

The new commission should also make recommendations on ensuring free of cost education up to class 8, adequate salary for teachers and the

improvement of their quality of work, she said.

The policymakers will need to take steps to have a comprehensive education law like neighbouring India, Sri Lanka and Nepal have, she added.

The first education policy was formulated in 1972 under the leadership of Qudrat-e-Khuda but it was not fully implemented. Later, successive governments formed commissions and committees to formulate new education policies -- one led by Majid Uddin Ahmed in 1983; one by Prof Shamsul Haque in 1997; another led by MA Bari in 2001 and Prof Moniruzzaman Miah in 2003.

HC clears Babar in 10-truck arms haul case

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arms smuggling case, observing that there is nothing in the police report as to who had smuggled the arms from whom and where.

The five others who got acquittal are former director of the Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI) Maj Gen (ret'd) Rezzakul Haider Chowdhury; ex-CUFL managing director Mohsin Talukder; former CUFL general manager (admin) Enamul Hoque; former additional secretary of industries ministry Nurul Amin; and Jamaat leader Motiur Rahman Nizami.

Nizami was executed in May, 2016 for crimes against humanity committed during the Liberation War in 1971.

The other acquitted people, however, were not freed from jail since they had been sentenced to life imprisonment in the illegal arms possession case and their appeals are pending with the HC, Babar's lawyer Mohammad Shishir Manir told The Daily Star.

All the 14 accused in the arms smuggling case had been sentenced to life imprisonment in the arms possession case by the lower court, the lawyer noted.

The HC commuted the death sentence of Paresch Barua, military

commander of United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), a separatist group fighting for an independent Assam, to life imprisonment because evidence "is available against him". The HC also said the judgement on Paresch was based on a Supreme Court decision, evidence on record, and circumstances.

The HC bench of Justice Mustafa Zaman Islam and Justice Nasreen Akter also commuted death sentences of six other convicts to 10 years' imprisonment in the case.

The six are former NSI director wing commander (ret'd) Shahab Uddin; former NSI deputy director Maj (ret'd) Liakat Hossain; ex-NSI field officer Akbar Hossain Khan; local smuggler Hafizur Rahman; labour supplier Deen Mohammad; and trawler owner Haji Sobhan.

The HC also commuted the Tk 5 lakh fines slapped on each of the six by the trial court to Tk 10,000 each.

In this case, former director general of the NSI Brig Gen (ret'd) Md Abdur Rahim was sentenced to death and fined by the trial court. Yesterday, the HC in its judgment declared his appeal abated (ended) as he had died earlier. However, the HC imposed a fine of Tk 10,000 on him. The successors of Rahim will have

to pay the fines, Shishir Manir said.

The HC bench delivered the verdict after holding hearings on the death references and appeals in the case for 13 working days.

Lawyers SM Shahjahan, Shishir Manir, Mohammad Ahsan, Sadhan Kumar Banik and Md Mohiuddin argued for the appellants while Deputy Attorney General Sultana Akter Rubi and assistant attorneys general Mahfujul Awal and Shamima Akhter Banu represented the state during hearings.

HC OBSERVATIONS

Delivering the verdict, the HC observed that the purpose of the trial was "to convict the guilty and at the same time to protect the innocent".

In this case, the HC found multiple lacunae concerning the investigation, a lack of due diligence and coercion of evidence.

The police charge sheet against people who may just be connected to uploading the arms, the HC said.

"It has not been mentioned in the police report about the country of origin of the arms and it has not been mentioned to whom it was going to be delivered. It has not been mentioned by which vessel it was brought into Bangladesh."