Bangladesh stands with Palestinians

Says Irene Khan at UNSC

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has reaffirmed its unwavering solidarity with the Palestinian people and their inalienable right to self-determination, calling for urgent international action to end Israeli occupation, illegal settlement expansion and human rights violations.

She made the call yesterday while addressing the UN Security Council's open debate on "The Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question", according to a press release issued by Bangladesh's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York.

The Bangladesh's permanent representative to the UN strongly condemned the devastation in Gaza and expressed grave concern over escalating land confiscation, violence and illegal settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

"The deadlock in the Security Council has enabled Israel to operate with impunity," she said, urging the council to act decisively to halt annexation, forced displacement and human rights violations, and ensure accountability.

She also called for full respect for UNRWA's mandate and continued humanitarian assistance to Palestinians.

Condemning Israeli attacks and occupation in Syria and Lebanon, she emphasised the need for an adequate UN presence in Lebanon and offered Bangladesh's support.

She also condemned deadly Houthi attacks on Saudi Arabian airports that caused civilian casualties, including among Bangladeshi migrant workers.



INTO THE MYSTIC

Baul artistes perform songs of Fakir Lalon Shah at Zainul Udyan in Mymensingh city yesterday, marking the mystic poet's 136th death anniversary. Organised by Samaj Rupantar Sanskritik Sangha, the programme, titled "Manush Bhajle", celebrated Lalon's musical legacy and philosophy. Similar programmes were held across the country, including in Kushtia, Pirojpur and Manikganj. PHOTO: COLLECTED

BNP backtracking on July charter pledges: NCP

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP betrayed the nation by forming a special parliamentary committee to amend the constitution instead of implementing the July charter, alleged National Citizen Party (NCP) Secretary Akhter Hossen yesterday.

Speaking at an event marking the first anniversary of the charter's signing at the NCP office in the capital, he said the committee undermined the referendum verdict and would not resolve the constitutional crisis.

Akhter alleged that the BNP was backtracking on agreements reached during the National Consensus Commission talks.

He cited the repeal of the interim government's ordinance on the Supreme Court Secretariat and the failure to give opposition lawmakers chairmanships of parliamentary standing committees.

He said political parties had agreed to form a Constitution Reform Council to ensure lasting constitutional changes and prevent legal challenges.

Meanwhile, at a separate programme, Revolutionary Workers Party General Secretary Saiful Haque said the BNP had a major responsibility to implement the charter fully.

At another event, Rastro Songskar Andolon President Hasnat Quaiyum called for a united political movement to implement the July charter and uphold the referendum verdict.

Nepal floods 'defining moment' for climate action: UN

AFP, *Kathmandu*

Nepal's devastating floods should be a turning point for global climate action, with the international community helping the Himalayan nation recover, a top UN official told AFP yesterday.

The country suffered one of the worst disasters in its history on August 26, when a mountain collapse near the China border triggered catastrophic floods that killed more than 1,400 people and left over 5,000 missing.

Scientists said climate change played a significant role in that disaster.

Jorge Moreira da Silva, executive director of the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), which implements humanitarian and development projects, said he had witnessed "massive devastation" during a visit to affected communities.

Nepal, a largely rural country of 30 million people that contributes little to global greenhouse gas emissions, estimates reconstruction will cost $4.78 billion.

"This is a defining moment not only for Nepal, this is a defining moment for the international community," Moreira da Silva told AFP in Kathmandu.

"It's not fair to ask a country that emits almost nothing of CO2 to suddenly pay alone the consequence of something that was not generated by the country," he added.

"That's why it's fundamental that global solidarity is brought to this equation."

Moreira da Silva said reconstruction and resettlement must account for future climate risks, while the international community must "renew its commitment to climate".

"It's also about climate justice and climate responsibility," he said, warning that low-emitting countries would continue to bear the brunt of climate change.

1,800 face Oct 31 deadline

FROM PAGE 12

September 3, when Cambodian immigration police detained 32 Bangladeshis at Phnom Penh airport as they attempted to leave after allegedly being exploited in online scam centres.

Sources said they were detained over irregular immigration status and other complications during immigration checks.

Two of them were released earlier, while the remaining 30 were held at an immigration detention centre until Friday evening following prolonged diplomatic negotiations.

The 30 people are expected to return in the next couple of days, Zahir Imam, first secretary (labour) at the Bangladesh Embassy in Thailand, told The Daily Star. Sources said they would pay for their own tickets.

However, the fate of hundreds of others remains uncertain, including those unable to afford tickets home.

Bangladesh has no embassy in Cambodia, and its Bangkok mission handles consular affairs there.

Imam said the mission had received requests concerning 1,796 Bangladeshis stranded in Cambodia through phone calls, emails, direct applications and community contacts.

Around 350 to 400 have returned since July, but the mission could not independently verify all the names or establish the current whereabouts and circumstances of everyone on its list, he said.

Cambodian authorities had interviewed Bangladeshis seeking repatriation to determine whether they were trafficking victims or linked to scam centres and trafficking networks. Those verified as victims were allowed to return, Imam said.

The process has temporarily stopped, and the Bangladesh mission has requested its resumption.

Anirban Survivor Voice Foundation estimates that more than 2,000 Bangladeshis remain stranded, with around 1,800 facing uncertainty over the October 31 deadline under an arrangement concerning immigration overstay penalties. Its president and co-founder, Al Amin Nayon, said the organisation had sought clarification on the arrangement's conditions, eligibility criteria and provisions for waiving fines.

Nayon said the foundation would submit a memorandum to the expatriates' welfare and overseas employment minister today, with copies to the foreign affairs and home ministries. It is demanding urgent repatriation, individual screening to identify trafficking victims, protection from punishment for crimes committed under coercion, rehabilitation and action against trafficking networks.

FAMILIES IN DEBT

Kabir Hossain said he had spent around Tk 13 lakh supporting his 24-year-old son Shawon since he travelled to Cambodia nearly one and a half years ago.

Shawon was promised a computer-related job paying around Tk 1.5 lakh a month. His family borrowed much of the Tk 6 lakh needed for his journey, but he could not send money home. Instead, Kabir repeatedly sent money for his son's food, accommodation and other expenses.

"Now I don't know how I will repay these debts," Kabir, who works for a private company, told The Daily Star.

He said he had lost money on two attempts to arrange his son's return and was preparing to buy another ticket, hoping Shawon could return on October 19 or 20.

QUESTIONS OVER OVERSIGHT

Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) records show that 15,963 Bangladeshis received employment clearance for Cambodia between January 1, 2025, and September 30, 2026.

Shariful Hasan, associate director of BRAC's Migration Programme and Youth Platform, questioned the lack of effective monitoring of workers' employers, working conditions and whereabouts despite the clearances.

"We have sent around 16,000 people there with BMET clearance, yet we do not have a mechanism to find out where they are or what they are doing," he told The Daily Star.

He cited allegations of harassment and torture against Bangladeshis trying to leave Cambodia. Survivors have described being lured by promises of legitimate jobs and then forced into cyber scam operations. Some said their passports were confiscated and they faced threats and extortion.

On October 8, the bodies of three Bangladeshis were brought home from Cambodia, including 23-year-old Sohag Ahmed of Jhenaidah, who allegedly became trapped in a scam compound after travelling with BMET clearance.

Shariful said the government must identify those stranded, establish their circumstances and ensure their safe return.

Bangladesh economy caught in 'structural trap'

FROM PAGE 3

employment opportunities and underemployment were growing concerns.

More than half of households also had at least one member with a chronic illness, exposing them to repeated healthcare expenses, he added.

He identified stagnant investment and sluggish growth as the second dimension of the structural trap.

"There are countries where households face economic hardship, but investment continues to grow. In our case, however, household distress is accompanied by stagnant or declining investment and sluggish growth," he said.

The third dimension, he said, is political economy and governance, which determine the country's ability to address household distress and lack of economic dynamism.

Zillur called for a comprehensive transition compact built around five pillars: economic democracy, new growth drivers, quality education and skills, productive transformation, and faster governance.

"Bangladesh needs new growth drivers," he said, urging diversification beyond garments and remittances, greater support for promising sectors such as pharmaceuticals, and faster, evidence-based decision-making.

At the event, Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, warned that poverty and inequality could be higher than estimated if poverty lines were not adequately adjusted for inflation.

He called for higher revenue collection to expand public spending, along with improved agricultural productivity and stronger links between farmers, industry and global markets.

Describing quality education as the country's biggest challenge, he called for greater investment in technical education, digital skills, high-speed internet and emerging sectors to create jobs and improve competitiveness.

Jean Pesme, World Bank country director for Bangladesh and Bhutan, said the economy needs urgent structural transformation in trade, public finance and energy efficiency.

He also stressed the need to align education and skills with private-sector needs to restore confidence and create jobs.

Fazlul Hoque, administrator of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said no sector beyond garments had taken off in the past two decades, leaving the economy increasingly dependent on RMG exports.

He added that degrees no longer guarantee jobs and criticised bureaucratic delays, saying young people will not tolerate visiting government offices 30-40 times to obtain routine permits.

Farah Kabir, country director of ActionAid Bangladesh, said informal workers are struggling with rising food prices and the lack of minimum wage guarantees.

As female employment in the RMG sector declined, she called for alternative jobs in agro-ecology, childcare centres and gender-sensitive investment.

Judge Farrukh Ahmad by his poetry, not politics

FROM PAGE 3

Wahiduzzaman urged readers to study the memoirs of Farrukh's colleagues to understand his character and called for his works to be included in school, college and university curricula.

Journalist Shamsuddoza Sajen said a broader assessment of the poet's literature, ideas and personality is needed.

Born in 1918, Farrukh Ahmad is known in Bangla literature as the "poet of the Muslim Renaissance".

Alongside Muslim heritage and Arabic-Persian influences, his poetry explored exploitation, poverty and the aspiration for human liberation. He died in 1974.

The discussion was moderated by Emran Mahfuz.

3 of a family among 5 killed as truck rams auto-rickshaw

FROM PAGE 12

confirmed that five people had died and one critically injured person had been referred to Mymensingh Medical College Hospital.

Kausar Ali, officer-in-charge of Roumari Police Station, said the auto-rickshaw was travelling towards Kartimari when the truck, coming from the opposite direction, hit it.

Assistant Superintendent of Police Russel Kabir said the truck driver and helper fled after the accident. Police seized the truck and were examining its documents.

The accident disrupted traffic on the highway for nearly two and a half hours. Traffic returned to normal after 5:00pm.

Nearly half of the families now in debt

FROM PAGE 1

food, while urban areas spend more on non-food items. Non-food expenses account for 56.7 percent of city corporation households' monthly expenses.

In contrast, the 2022 Household Income and Expenditure Survey found the national average household income to be Tk 32,422 and the national average expenses Tk 31,500.

The commission ordered the special survey to aid in its recommendation for salary hike under the ninth pay scale.

The survey, which was conducted from September 14 to September 18 last year, gathered data using tablet devices and digital Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing across 150 primary sampling units, interviewing 3,000 households across rural, urban and city corporation areas.

The latest survey findings serve as a mirror image of the weak macroeconomic environment Bangladesh has experienced since the pandemic, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

There has been a steady decline in economic growth in recent years alongside high single-digit or double-digit inflation that is showing no signs of abating. At the same time, employment has remained stagnant while real wages have steadily fallen, he said.

Inflation has outpaced wage growth for 56 consecutive months in September, government data show.

In September, wage growth fell to 7.9 percent from 8.05 percent the previous month, according to the BBS's Wage Rate Index, which tracks monthly wages of low-paid skilled and unskilled workers across 63 occupations in agriculture, industry and services.

"Under these circumstances, asking any family about their situation yields the expected answer that incomes are dropping while costs are climbing, leaving many with no choice but to take on debt," Zahid said.

He stressed that the surge in expenses is not driven by an improved quality of life, but rather by the rising cost of living.

Explaining why rural debt is higher than urban debt, he pointed out that income stagnation is far more pronounced in villages, whereas cities offer relatively more economic opportunities.

While remittance income serves as a positive factor in rural areas, its benefits reach no more than 7 to 8 percent of the rural population. Consequently, a large portion of the population is now surviving by depleting savings built up in earlier years, he said.

"This survey data confirms the WB's macroeconomic projections that poverty rates are on the rise," Zahid added.

A prolonged slowdown is eroding household welfare through weak labour demand and persistent inflation, pushing national poverty to an estimated 22.5 percent in 2026 from 18.7 percent in 2022, according to the WB's latest Bangladesh Development Update, released on October 6.

Extreme poverty, measured at the $3-a-day international line, rose from 5.9 percent to an estimated 10.1 percent over the same period.

The economic strain is largely driven by a four-year inflationary surge that has systematically squeezed household purchasing power.

This is compounded by acute energy shortages that have curtailed business operating hours, forced factory closures, and stalled job creation, particularly within the country's industrial sectors, the WB report added.

The beating heart of Durga Puja

FROM PAGE 12

his father struggle and chose a different path. He now works as a journalist at a local newspaper.

The younger generation's reluctance to inherit the drumsticks is compounded by a shift in the seasonal migration of artists across the country. Historically, the capital has been the destination of choice for seasonal performers during Durga Puja.

"There was once a time when dhakis from all over the country would come to Dhaka during Durga Puja in search of work and stay until Kali Puja," Ripon recalls. "There was better pay here than in the suburbs and villages."

Now, a reverse seasonal migration is occurring as urban expenses rise. "Nowadays, they're reluctant to come to Dhaka because the costs outweigh the pay," Ripon explains. "There are better opportunities in suburban towns where puja organisers backed by wealthy donors offer better pay to employ local dhakis."

The financial anxieties of the drummers stand in sharp contrast to the festival's global profile.

In 2021, UNESCO inscribed Durga Puja on its Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, recognising the festival's extraordinary cultural value and the many traditional art forms that sustain it.

Heritage, however prestigious, cannot guarantee livelihoods.

As the nights of Durga Puja unfold across Dhaka, the city's temples continue to pulse with the familiar rhythms of the dhak. Worshippers sway to its cadence. Priests move in step with its tempo. Children watch in fascination.

Few pause to consider the uncertain future of the men producing those sounds.

For now, the beat endures.

For five autumn days, the dhakis will breathe life into the festival, sustaining a tradition that has endured for generations, even as the heartbeat of their own profession grows fainter with each passing year.

Dipke, Neha Bora released in India

FROM PAGE 12

deleted during the revision. The Election Commission has denied favouring any party and said wrongly deleted voters can re-enrol. The BJP has accused rivals of trying to undermine democracy by wrongly questioning legitimate electoral processes.

Student activist Neha Bora, a prominent face of the protests, who was also detained on Friday as she tried to reach central Delhi with dozens of supporters, was released yesterday.

"Please, spare the people of India. Impeach Gyanesh Kumar and halt SIR (special intensive revision), so that the ordinary citizens of this country can breathe a sigh of relief, feel at ease, and have their voting rights ensured," Bora told ANI news agency after she was released.

Dipke was detained on Friday as he stepped out of a house in central Delhi, with police hauling him into a police car and driving away after a brief argument.

Dipke had called Friday's protest in support of two CJP leaders detained and sent to jail this week for five days for demonstrating at a protest site in violation of a ban.

Earlier on Friday, police had met Dipke and warned him against going ahead with the protest.

Student groups called for more protest action on Saturday.

The movement, which was mobilised by the youth and joined by many opposition parties, has emerged as one of the biggest political challenges faced by Modi and the BJP in the prime minister's 12 years in power.