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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Bangladesh moving forward

Bangladesh is now recognised as one of the next 11 emerging economies in the world. In 1971, I don't believe many people would have guessed that Bangladesh, 45 years later, would perform this well. Its per capita income is now USD 1,466 and its foreign investment is nearly USD 2.23 billion. Women's participation rate in our labour force is 41 percent, the school dropout rate has been reduced to 20.4 percent and the literacy rate is about 63 percent. The child mortality rate for those aged under 5 has also been reduced to 36 per thousand.

There are now 143 schemes of social safety net programmes and the poverty rate has dropped to 22.4 percent. In short, Bangladesh has, indeed, overcome a myriad of problems and has made substantial progress during the past four decades. Presently, Bangladesh is aiming to become a middle-income country by 2021.

Despite our growing economy, we have quite a few significant challenges ahead of us. The widening discrepancy between the rich and the poor within the country is striking. The political milieu over the last few decades has been covered in bitterness, animosity and violent behaviour of our mainstream political parties. Confrontational politics has been the hallmark of our politics.

To move forward successfully, the political situation of our country needs changing. We look forward to our economy flourishing in the near future. But the political running of the country must be improved for that to happen.

Rafik Alamgir
Chittagong

Mogholhat port shut for 21 years

*Call to hold talks with India for
reopening the land port*

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

The government should hold bilateral talks with neighbouring India to reopen the Mogholhat land port and customs check post to boost trade between the two countries.

People from all walks of life under the banner of 'Mogholhat Land Port Bastabayan Sangram Committee' urged the government at a human chain at Nuruldin Mancho in Lalmonirhat's Sadar upazila on Friday.

Speakers at the rally said the socio-economic status of the people living in the area was much stronger when the port was functional, adding that now it looks gloomy as a good number of locals remain unemployed due to the situation.

They said Mogholhat land port became inoperative when the Indian government took a unilateral decision to close their customs office at Gidaldah in Cooch Behar district in India in 1996.

Following India's decision, the Bangladesh government also closed its customs check post and other activities at the port the same year.

Abu Taiyab, general secretary of the Sangram Committee, said Mogholhat-Gidaldah route is the easiest way to travel to Bhutan and India's West Bengal and Assam. "If the government takes necessary step to reopen the port it would become a source of job opportunities for many locals," he added.

Local lawmaker Abu Saleh Md Sayeed Dulal said the matter has already been placed to the ministry concerned.

After discussing with India, the government will take necessary steps to reopen the port soon, he added.

Unplanned construction

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said without the "behavioural protocol" (or a set rules of behaviour), the maximum benefit could not be reaped from any infrastructure.

"There is a multi-storey car park at the Dhaka airport, where tickets are given for entry and exit... But there is zero management on how the cars get in and out," he said, while sharing his recent experience at the airport.

He also alleged that even after building the four lanes in the Dhaka-Chittagong highway, the average travel time between Dhaka and Chittagong had not come down due to the roadside businesses.

Dr AKM Abul Kalam, president of BIP, said capacity building for urban government was a prime necessity for urban planning, and the whole country should be under a national physical planning programme.

Dr Christopher J Webster, dean of the faculty of architect of Hong Kong University (HKU), and Dr Rebecca LH Chiu, head of the urban planning and design department, HKU, presented papers at the dialogue.

Hasina seeks cooperation to sustain pace of development

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina sought cooperation from all to continue the present pace of development.

The premier was speaking at the inaugural of a three-day Development Fair-2017 across the country through videoconferencing from her official Gono Bhaban residence in the capital yesterday.

The fair has been organised to bring all people under the government's activities by informing the success stories to achieve Vision 2021 and Vision 2041 as well as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Terming terrorism and militancy as the main barriers to development, the prime minister reiterated her call to the people of all levels to build a social spirit against the twin social vices.

Highlighting various initiatives of her government to reduce poverty, Hasina said, "Bangladesh would be considered as a poverty-free middle income country if we can cut the rate by 7/8 percent by 2021."

Elaborating her government's steps for development, the premier said, "Whenever Awami League comes to power, we think it's our responsibility to serve the people."



She said the government has introduced micro-saving project instead of microcredit to make the marginal people self-reliant and free them from the high interest rate of microcredit.

Her government is establishing 100 economic zones across the country to create employment opportunities, she added.

The premier said Bangladesh has earned food autarchy and in order to ensure food for all, misuse of agriculture land should be stopped by banning the establishment of industries here and there.

She also underscored the need for proper marketing of various agro items that are being produced in different areas of the country so that the interest of the farmers could be protected.

The premier hoped that the Bangladesh missions abroad will arrange similar fairs to project the development strides of the government to the expatriate Bangladeshis as well as the development partners.

Senior ministers and government officials were present on the occasion.

Later, the people and officials of four districts -- Tangail, Barisal, Khulna and Gopalganj -- were connected through the videoconferencing. Various government and non-government organisations, banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions are taking part in the fairs.

THREE-DAY BEACH CARNIVAL KUAKATA BEGINS

Airport to be built to attract tourists: Muhith

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The government will build an airport in Payra sea port area to ease communication for visitors in Kuakata sea beach, a tourist spot with immense natural beauty in the southern district.

Finance Minister Abul Maal Abdul Muhith made the announcement yesterday morning while inaugurating as the chief guest a three-day 'Mega Beach Carnival Kuakata, 2017', aiming to make the area more popular among the tourists.

Making Kuakata more attractive along with development of communications by roads, river and air is needed to introduce it positively to tourists from both home and abroad, he said.

"We have a plan to develop Kuakata as an attractive tourist spot within two years. Now one can reach Kuakata from Payra port easily. The authorities of Payra port will hopefully take step for development of Kuakata sea beach area," he said.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had announced 2016 as "Tourism Year" and Bangladesh Tourism Board (BTB), Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation

(BPC) and non-government tourism organisations will organise round-the-year events till 2018 as part of the Tourism Year's programmes to brand Bangladesh as a unique tourist destination, said Civil Aviation and Tourism Minister Rashed Khan Menon.

All three bridges on Patuakhali-Kuakata road have already been completed and construction work of a new bridge on the Payra river at Lebukhali is going on, he said.

After completion of the Padma Bridge, the number of tourists from home and abroad would rise in Kuakata and consequently, more employment opportunities will be created, he added.

Closing ceremony of the carnival will be held on the night of January 16.

Kuakata in the south of Patuakhali has an 18-kilometre-long and 3-kilometre-wide sandy beach. From the beach, one can have an unobstructed view of both sunrise and sunset over the Bay of Bengal.

In the three-day carnival, special entertainment facilities have been

arranged for the tourists, such as beach football, beach cricket, volleyball, kite flying, local games, water bike, ATB rides, boat rowing, beach lighting, camp fire, Kuakata-Sundarbans sea cruise etc.

Adventurous feats like ascending and descending, tree top activities, adventure gear shop, fire camp, BBQ, forest trekking, walking and cycle rally are being also organised there.

Besides eye-catching natural view of Kuakata, diversified lifestyles of the Rakhaine people, a historic well, boat of ancient period, and Buddhist and Hindu temples would be of special attraction for visitors.

Chief Whip of the Jatiya Sangsad ASM feroz, lawmakers Md Mahbubur Rahman Talukder, AKM Jahangir Hossain, ABM Ruhul Amin Howlader and Shawkat Hasanur Rahman, National Board of Revenue Chairman Md Najibur Rahman and Local Government Division secretary Abdul Maleq addressed the grand opening ceremony chaired by BTB Secretary SM Ghulam Farooque.

FOUR YEARS OF OPENING OF GUBRAKURA, KAROITALI LAND PORTS Yet to see full operation

MD AMINUL ISLAM, *Mymensingh*

Over four years after the inauguration, Gubrakura and Karoitali land ports in Haluaghat under the district are yet to start full-fledged functioning.

Shipping Minister Shahjahan Khan formally inaugurated the land ports, first of its kind in Mymensingh region, on September 15 in 2012.

But the land ports, some 174 kilometres from Dhaka and 57 kilometres from Mymensingh town, are used mainly for a limited scale import of coal.

Traders have urged development of sufficient infrastructure including wide roads, warehouse, yards, weighbridge, administrative building at the land ports to boost export

and import through them.

Check post with immigration facilities should be introduced immediately to make the ports fully functional, said M Suruj Miah, president of Karoitali Coal and Coke Importers Welfare Association.

"Border market and corridor at the land ports should open soon to boost economic growth in this area and the country as well.

"We want a four-lane road from the land ports to Mymensingh for easy transport of the import and export items. This year 5000 tonnes of stone was imported through the ports," he said.

If the land port starts full functioning, the government and the people, especially of this area, would be benefited as financial activities will

see a boost and more job opportunities will be created, said traders.

Ismail Hossain Mondol, secretary of Karoitali Coal and Coke Importers Welfare Association, said some 1000 importers are engaged in coal import at Karoitali and Gubrakura Land Customs (LC) stations now but the import and export will increase manifold when the port becomes fully functional.

"If the land port starts functioning in full swing, we will be able to import coal, stone, bamboo, raw materials of cement, chemicals, fruits, spices, paper, motorcycle, light and heavy vehicles, spare parts and so on," said Ali Asgar, secretary of Haluaghat Exporters and Importers Group.

It will ease export of readymade garments, cement, melamine, ceram-

ics, cosmetics, juice, frozen and dry fishes and packaged food items to India and Bhutan, he added.

Fully functional land ports with immigration and export facilities will bring added revenue for the government round the year, traders said, adding that it will also help easy visit to many Indian states including Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, Arunachal and West Bengal.

Md Lutfur Rahman, revenue officer of Gubrakura and Karoitali LC stations, said the government earned around Tk 70 crore as revenue in two years till October last year from the two land ports.

If immigration and export facilities are available through the ports, the revenue earning would be doubled, he hoped.

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Book on architecture launched in capital

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Architecture is not merely about making a building, it is also about designing landscape and locations, said noted architects at a book launching ceremony in the capital yesterday.

In today's Bangladesh, architects have to have a deeper relation with the water and designing of hydro-geography, said architecture educator Prof Kazi Khaleed Ashraf.

Ashraf, also the director general of Bengal Institute, edited the book "Locations: Anthology of Architecture and Urbanism".

Bengal Foundation, Bengal institute for Architecture, Landscapes and Settlements in association with The Edge Foundation organised the event at Edge Gallery in Gulshan.

Printed in San Francisco, the book contains 21 articles on different issues of architecture by noted architects from India, Japan, Turkey and Hong Kong. It is the first volume of a series.

Marcia Stephens Bloom Bernicat, US ambassador to Bangladesh, who attended as the chief guest, said the book provides a unique insight into how people interact with nature and each other.

Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher of The Daily Star, a special guest at the event, said Dhaka is virtually being ruined in the name of modernisation and development.

Abul Khair Litu, chairman of Bengal Foundation, and Prof Shamsul Wares, an educator of architecture, also spoke.

Ensure right to water

Speakers tell conference on 'Water Democracy' in Kuakata

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

A two-day conference titled "Water Democracy" started at Hotel Nilanjona in Kuakata under the district yesterday.

Speaker at the conference organised by ActionAid Bangladesh urged preparing proper guidelines to save rivers and ensure water rights of people from all sections of the society.

The programme focused on issues like 'Water governance in South Asia', 'Water and ecosystem', 'Water and livelihood', and 'Women and water'.

"Like voting rights, water right should be given due importance as it is directly connected with life. We need water-based urban development plan and research as Bangladesh is a riverine country," Prof Dr Imtiaz Ahmed of the Department of International Relations, University of Dhaka, said at the conference.

Emphasising environmental, economic, political and social aspects of water, Dr Ainun Nishat, professor emeritus of BRAC University, said knowledge from locals should be taken into serious consideration while planning on water.

Role of women should be increased in water management system as they have

practical knowledge on the issue, the noted water expert said.

"Urgent steps should be taken to save water from pollution and address the problems of salinity rise, threat to biodiversity and livelihood of people near river areas.

"While building bridges on rivers, care should be taken so that the process does not make the water courses narrow," he said.

Unplanned construction of dams and embankments on rivers adds to the problem of already shrinking sweet water sources at home and abroad, speakers said.

Shamsur Ali, manager, Land and Water Rights Department of ActionAid Bangladesh, presented the keynote in the opening session with Farah Kabir, Country Director of the organisation, in the chair.

M Inamul Haque, chairman of Institute of Water and Environment, Nazrul Islam, program director of Asia Foundation, Dr Md Nurul Alam, deputy director of Department of Bangladesh Haor and Wetlands Development, Sabitri Pokharel, adviser of Mahila Adhikar Manch in Nepal, Rahima Sultana Kazol, executive director of local NGO AVAS, addressed the programme.