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PM calls for exploring new markets, inaugurates DITF

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged businessmen to explore new markets and improve quality of products to boost export earnings. She was inaugurating the month-long Dhaka International Trade Fair at Bangabandhu International Conference Centre in Dhaka on 1 January 2018.



"You (businessmen) should look for new countries, new markets and assess the demands in those markets. If we can do that we'll be able to boost our business," she said.

The Prime Minister assured the businessmen of providing her government's all-out support to expand the country's export basket.

Sheikh Hasina mentioned that Bangladesh is currently exporting 750 items to 199 countries across the globe. "But, I think, we've to march forward and expand and improve our export basket." She said the businessmen should also look at the domestic market to expand their business.

Describing Bangladesh as an agriculture dependent country, she said it is natural for a country to go for industrialisation if it wants to achieve economic growth.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed and President of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry Shafiul Islam Mohiuddin also spoke.

The government has taken steps to set up 100 special economic zones in the country, as part of efforts to promote export and industrialisation and encourage foreign investment, Sheikh Hasina said.

She said some 17 missions, including 12 new embassies in 12 countries, have been opened during her government's current tenure with an aim to expand trade and commerce.

The Prime Minister said Bangladesh is currently exporting pharmaceutical products to over 100 countries. She also announced pharmaceuticals and their raw materials as the 'Products of the Year for 2018' to take the industry to a dignified position.

Jan 5 polls were not voter-less, PM tells ALWC meeting

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has said the 5th January general elections in 2014 were not a voter-less polls, like those held during the BNP and Ershad regimes.

"Many quarters claimed that the January 5 elections were voter-less elections. But, in fact, by no means it was a voter-less one as 40 percent voters exercised their franchise in that elections amidst orchestrated violence by the BNP," she said.



"Our present government remains in power for the last four years as people voted it to power, which Ershad and BNP could not do in 1990 and 1996," Sheikh Hasina said.

The Prime Minister said this in her introductory speech in the Awami League Central Working Committee meeting at the Gonobhaban on 6 January 2018.

Sheikh Hasina said Khaleda Zia was forced

to resign within one and a half months as they rigged votes of the people on 15 February 1996.

Blaming the BNP for destroying democratic rights of the people, the Prime Minister said Ziaur Rahman grabbed the power at gunpoint from Justice Sayem, like General Ayub Khan did. Justice Sayem mentioned this in his book titled "Last Phase at Bangabhaban".

At the ALCWC meeting, Sheikh Hasina warned party ticket aspirants of the next parliamentary polls not to speak against the existing lawmakers.

Police must be held accountable for every action, says PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina asked the policemen to build themselves as members of a pro-people force as their duty towards people is enormous.

Describing the Bangladesh Police as a symbol of peace, security and discipline, she hoped each and every police member would carry out his duties properly, and come forward in aid of the helpless and distressed people.

inaugurated the Police Week-2018 at Dhaka Metropolitan Police Lines in Rajarbagh on January 8, she asked the policemen to achieve greater efficiency in technology to hunt down transnational criminals and those involved in money laundering and cybercrime.

Sheikh Hasina assured the force of providing its members with proper training at home and abroad to enhance their capability to deal with science-based investigations and improve their ICT skills.

Sheikh Hasina referred to the formation of the police's anti-terrorism unit to boost the capability of the force in stamping out terrorism. She hoped that the unit would continue to play its effective role in eradicating the menace as well as bringing the patrons of terrorists to book.



She appreciated the introduction of online police clearance service, mobile apps Bd Police Helpline, e-traffic prosecution and fine payment systems and National Emergency Service-999.

She called upon all to work together to build the country as the most developed and prosperous one in South Asia as dreamt by Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

Hasina reviewed a parade of different contingents of the police. She handed over awards to 182 police personnel for their outstanding performance in 2017.

Stay united for country's development PM tells workers on Bangabandhu's Homecoming Day

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has called upon all to remain united to expedite the development of the country.

"We'll build... a hunger- and poverty-free Bangladesh as dreamt by the Father of the Nation...this is our vow today. I urge the people to stay united to expedite the development activities...", she said.

The Prime Minister was addressing a discussion organised by Bangladesh Awami League at Bangabandhu International Conference Center (BICC), marking Bangabandhu's Homecoming Day. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman returned to independent Bangladesh following his release from Pakistani jail in 1972.

Hasina said it is the prime task of the government to improve the lifestyle of the people.

"The Father of the Nation is no more with us, but his ideals are... We're are trying to materialise and fulfill the vision he had spelt out in his speech on January 10, 1972 after returning home, and the plans he laid out to run the country," she said.

Criticising those who always say Ziaur Rahman introduced multiparty democracy in the country, Hasina said Ziaur Rahman did a mockery in the name of democracy.

"He [Zia] had tried to confuse the nation. Accepting that, some people appreciated him, but they never think anything deeply for a moment," she said.

Hasina, also the chief of Awami League, said Zia, in the name of multiparty democracy, had rehabilitated war criminals. He had given the anti-independence force a chance to do politics and returned the voting rights to war criminals. "This is not the democracy of people...this was just renaming rehabilitation of war criminals."



Under Bangabandhu's leadership, she said, Bangladesh for the first time achieved a 7.5 percent growth rate and the people of the country started dreaming of a bright future.

Massacre in Rakhine: Myanmar admits it for the first time

Myanmar security forces took part in a massacre of 10 Rohingya in September, the army chief's office said on 10 January 2018, as it admitted for the first time abuses during a crackdown that sparked a mass exodus of the Muslim minority.



The massacre took place on September 2 in the village of Inn Din in Rakhine state, the Facebook post said, as tensions escalated pitting Rohingya against security forces and ethnic Rakhine locals following the killing of a Rakhine man.

"Some villagers from Inn Din village and security members confessed they killed 10 Bengali terrorists," the office said in its post, using a pejorative term for Rohingya and blaming militants for causing the unrest in the village.

The post also gave the first confirmation of a mass Rohingya grave inside Rakhine state following an army-led crackdown on militants from the minority group in late August.

Refugees who have fled in their hundreds of thousands to Bangladesh have given consistent accounts of massacres, rape and torture by Myanmar security forces flanked by ethnic Rakhine mobs.

Myanmar's army chief Min Aung Hlaing as well as the country's civilian leader Aung San Suu Kyi have repeatedly promised to punish anyone found guilty of abuses.

Economy to stay strong: says WB

The World Bank has painted a brighter picture for Bangladesh's economy for the next two fiscal years, pinning hopes on strong domestic demand, exports, investment and remittance.

The Global Economic Prospects, a flagship report of the World Bank Group, said activity in Bangladesh would grow at an average of 6.7 percent a year over fiscals 2018-2020, benefiting from strong domestic demand and strengthening exports.

"Low interest rates and improved infrastructure are expected to lift investment," said the report, which was unveiled globally on 9 January 2018.

Remittances are expected to rebound as growth firms up in Gulf Cooperation Council countries, the report said.

Bangladesh is among the top 17 out of 134 countries in the list of GEP forecasts that are projected to have a growth rate of 6.4 percent or more in 2017-18, said Zahid Hussain, lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office. The government has set a target of 7.4 percent GDP growth for the current fiscal year.

The WB report said commodity importers across Asia continued to register solid growth, in line with potential rates, supported by robust domestic demand and strengthening exports. According to the report, the growth remained strong in Bangladesh despite disruptions related to floods.

In South Asia, growth slowed to an estimated 6.5 percent in 2017, marginally below the June 2017 forecast owing to temporary disruptions from adverse weather conditions across the region.

PM's address to nation: Polls-time govt as per constitution

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has made it clear that the next general election would be held in line with constitutional provisions at the end of this year.

But she expressed her high optimism that all the parties registered with the Election Commission would join the race and uphold the country's democratic process.

"How the election will be held is clearly stated in our constitution. An election-time government will be formed under the constitution which will provide all-out cooperation to the Election Commission to conduct the election," the PM said.

Sheikh Hasina was addressing the nation on 12 January marking her government's four years in office after the 5th January national election in 2014.



In her 26-minute speech, the PM said the president constituted the new Election Commission as per the recommendations of a search committee. And the Commission has already "gained people's confidence" through conducting some local government elections, including the ones to two city corporations, in a fair manner.

The PM, however, expressed her apprehension that some vested quarters might try to create anarchy in the country centring on the next election.

But the people will not tolerate the loss of lives and property in the name of a movement boycotting the election, she warned.

Describing people as the country's real owners, the third-time PM asked them to determine their goals. "You have to decide what you want to see -- advancement of the country or backward march of Bangladesh. Think for a moment about the situation in the country 10 years back."

Throwing a question to the nation, she said, "Don't you want to educate your children with quality education and make them self-dependent? Don't you want electricity in all houses, development of roads in all villages, food in all houses and a peaceful life?"

"We don't want to be identified as poor after 47 years of independence. We want to live as a dignified nation keeping our heads high in the world. If these are your desires, we're always beside you."

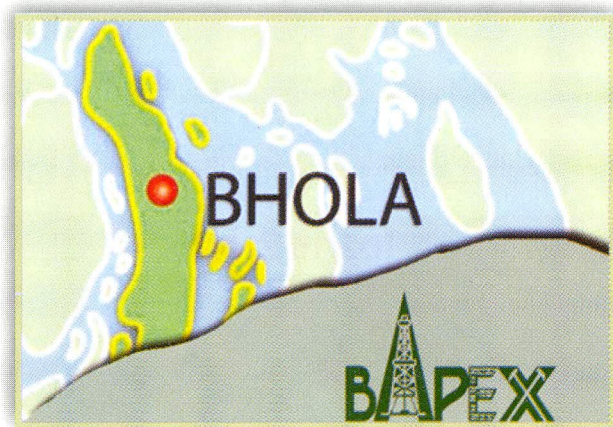
The PM mentioned that the government did not want to stick to the past, but would not surely forget the past. "We'll step forward evaluating successes and failures of the past and correcting the wrong and errors."

New gas field found in Bhola

Explorers have struck gas about 32km north of the Shahbazpur Gas Field in Bhola, a southern coastal district.

A total of 600 billion cubic feet of gas has been found in Bheduria union, Cabinet Secretary Mohammad Shafiul Alam disclosed to reporters at the Secretariat on 15 January 2018.

The discovery of the country's 27th gas field came at a time when the government is concentrating on the import of liquefied natural gas (LNG) amid dwindling reserves.



The new reserve would increase Bhola's gas reserve to 1.5 trillion cubic feet, the cabinet secretary said without specifying any details.

Certain geological tests must be done first to be able to say for sure if it is a new gas field and to ascertain the reserve volume.

Sources in the Bapex confided that it was likely to be a new gas field but had been disclosed prematurely.

Initial tests suggest that the gas field looked to be the most promising in Bangladesh. The gas

pressure was found to be at 5,600 PSI (pound per square inch) which is the highest among all gas fields in the country, they said.

According to Bapex, the country has about 11-12 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves with an annual consumption of about one trillion cubic feet.

Bangladesh an attractive place for investment, Says Pranab

Visiting former Indian president Pranab Mukherjee has said Bangladesh is an attractive place for investment. He said this during a meeting with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban on 15 January.

Pranab said he had been involved in politics for a long time and worked as a member of the Indian Lokshobha alongside holding the constitutional post.

He recalled that his first foreign tour as the Indian president was the tour of Bangladesh in March 2013.

On his arrival at the Gono Bhaban, Hasina received the former Indian president. Pranab's daughter Sharmistha Mukherjee also accompanied him.

Welcoming the veteran Indian leader, Hasina elaborated on the overall economic scenario of Bangladesh. She said the poverty level came down to 22 percent due to various pragmatic steps of her government.

She, however, said the economy incurred losses to some extent last year due to the floods in different parts of the country.

About the Rohingya issue, the PM said over one million Myanmar nationals, who fled to Bangladesh from Rakhine following a crackdown by government forces, have been given shelter in Cox's Bazar on humanitarian grounds.

PM's Principal Secretary Nojibur Rahman and Senior Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office Suraiya Begum were present.

Hasina later hosted a luncheon in honour of the former Indian president.

Pranab arrived in Dhaka on Sunday on a four-day private visit to Bangladesh.

Repatriation of Rohingyas to be completed in two years

Bangladesh and Myanmar have agreed on a two-year timeframe for the repatriation of hundreds of thousands of Rohingya, expected to begin on January 23, amid global concern over the repatriation climate and the safety of the returnees.

"The repatriation would be completed preferably within two years from the commencement of repatriation," said Bangladesh foreign ministry in a statement, following the first joint working group meeting (JWG) in Naypyitaw on January 15-16.



The meeting agreed that the verification and the return of the Rohingya will be based on the family as a unit, and finalised the "verification form".

The two countries formed the JWG on December 19, following a repatriation deal signed on November 23 last year amid global outcry over the military crackdown that the UN and the US described as ethnic cleansing.

More than 673,000 Rohingya have fled violence in Myanmar's Rakhine state since August 25 after the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army, a Rohingya insurgent group, attacked police and army posts.

According to the foreign ministry statement, Bangladesh would set up five transit camps from where returnees would be received initially at two reception centres on the Myanmar side.

Bangladesh Development Forum held in Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has urged the developed countries to stand beside Bangladesh in its journey towards prosperity.

Ensuring the supply of finance is a big challenge to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs), she said on opening Bangladesh Development Forum 2018 at the Sonargaon hotel in Dhaka.

"For this, the developed countries will have to come forward with financial and technical assistance."

The premier said Bangladesh also needs global support in dealing with challenges posed by environmental and climate change, and the international community must give more attention to the impending problem.

Hasina also urged the developed countries to be more courteous about a flexible world trade regime to help the developing countries like Bangladesh to achieve their overall development in poverty alleviation and employment generation.

Bangladesh Development Forum (BDF) is a high level meeting where the government and its development partners work to explore further partnerships to foster inclusive economic growth.

Terming Bangladesh a country with a lot of potential, Hasina said, "We have the confidence and resources to demonstrate ourselves as a dynamic economy before the world."

Bangladesh is ready to stand with the developing countries after coming out from the least developed country category and "a strategic preparation has been taken to face the impact", she said.



"The SDGs are very much supplementary to Bangladesh's national development priority and we are expecting to achieve the goals within the period of our eighth and ninth five-year plans."

She sought development partners' advice and opinion on Bangladesh's development plans.

Highlighting Bangladesh's economic progress over the last few years, she said the poverty rate was 56.7 percent in 1991 which now stands at 22.4 percent.

Poverty will come down to 14 percent by 2021, she said. In the last decade, she said, average GDP growth rate of Bangladesh was 6.26 percent, which has increased to 7.28 percent in the last fiscal year.

Hasina said Bangladesh was now the 44th largest economy in the world on the basis of GDP and its position on the basis of purchasing power is 32nd.

According to international financial analysts, Bangladesh will become the world's 28th and 23rd largest economy based on GDP and purchasing capacity by 2030 and 2050, she said.

Hasina hoped that the development forum would play an important role in determining collective action strategies and formulating necessary recommendations for building a poverty and hunger-free prosperous Bangladesh.

CHT people to enjoy land ownership

Urging the Chittagong Hill Tracts people to maintain peace and discipline, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina assured that they would enjoy the ownership of their land.

"Development is not possible without maintaining peaceful atmosphere ... so, keeping this in mind, I call upon all to work together to this end," she said while opening the 4000th Para Kendra (Village



Centre) in CHT through a videoconference from the Sonargaon Hotel in the capital.

The PM said the ownership of the land in the CHT would not be determined by the British-era laws; rather the people of the area would enjoy the ownership of the land as the people of other regions in the country did.

She also unveiled the cover of a book titled "Chittagong Hill Tracts: Journey towards Peace and Prosperity."

Regarding the dispute over land, the PM said the government formed the Land Commission and if the commission could sit regularly, the problem would be solved.

Recalling the signing of the CHT Peace Accord that ended two-decade insurgency problem in the CHT region, Hasina said the lion's share of the deal had already been implemented and the rest would be executed surely.

"We've signed the peace accord and we're implementing it ... we've withdrawn 250 army camps from the region."

The PM said there was no border outpost of the BGB in the area. "But we've set up such BOPs [border outposts] in the area ... we're working to improve the living standards of every people of the region."

Hasina said her government included those, who had surrendered arms, in the police and Ansar and VDP and arranged their training.

The premier said her government was working relentlessly for the development of the CHT region in line with the peace accord. They have been implementing massive projects in the region, she added.

Earlier, a video documentary highlighting the development activities in the three districts through Integrated Community Development Project was screened on the occasion.

WEF Development Index: Bangladesh ahead of most of its neighbours

Bangladesh has been ranked 34th in the World Economic Forum's Inclusive Development Index's (IDI) list of emerging economies, ahead of South Asian competitors India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka but behind Nepal.

India is ranked 62nd, Pakistan 52nd, Sri Lanka is 40th, the WEF says in the report published on Monday. Nepal is ranked 22nd.

Norway remains the world's most inclusive advanced economy, while Lithuania tops the list of emerging economies.

On a scale of one to seven, Bangladesh scored 3.98 in the IDI, with one being the worst and seven the best. India scored 3.09, Pakistan 3.55, Sri Lanka 3.79 and Nepal 4.15.

The IDI is an annual assessment of 103 countries' economic performance that measures how countries perform on 11 dimensions of economic progress in addition to the GDP. It has three pillars; growth and development; inclusion and; intergenerational equity -- sustainable stewardship of natural and financial resources.

Bangladesh an excellent investment destination: PM



Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday urged local and foreign entrepreneurs to invest in Bangladesh.

"You all can invest here. We want to provide necessary facilities to all the local and foreign investors."

There is ample scope to invest in every sector, including the economic zones and export processing zones, she said. The premier made the call while addressing the inaugural ceremony of Bepza International Investors' Summit 2018 at Bangabandhu International

Conference Centre in the capital on 24 January 2018.

She said no other country perhaps can ensure such an excellent investment-friendly atmosphere.

"We're providing maximum facilities, including cent percent repatriation of capital and profit and tax holidays."

Hasina said Bangladesh also has overcome the hurdles in the fields of electricity, energy, roads and other infrastructure facilities.

She said Bepza has already turned the country's EPZs into attractive destinations for investors from home and abroad. Hasina said the country's power generation capacity has increased to 16,350 megawatts (MW) from a mere 3,200 MW. Investment in Bepza has doubled while export increased by 2.5 times from 2009 to 2017, she said.

She said some 468 industries are in operation in eight EPZs set up on 2,307.27 acres of land. About 5 lakh Bangladeshis have been working in the EPZs and 64 percent of them are women. Some 283,620 new jobs have been created in the EPZs in the last nine years, she said.

Hasina said the EPZs under Bepza are contributing about 20 percent of the total national exports and foreign investment to the economy. Due to investment-friendly policies, investors from 38 countries, including China, Japan, South Korea, India, the USA and the UK, have been producing world famous brand items in the factories of EPZs, she added.

The prime minister said Bepza has undertaken an initiative to establish low-carbon green zones. "Our target is to set up industries and increase industrial production protecting our farmlands." She urged the workers of factories not to harm their factories at the instigation of any vested quarter.

Hasina said her government always gave importance to workers-owners' management relationship and enacted "EPZ Workers Welfare Council and Industrial Relation Law 2010" to protect the rights of workers.

She said the government hiked the pay and allowances of the workers of EPZs twice in the last seven years. "The workers are now getting healthcare services and medicines free of cost. Women workers are enjoying maternity leave and other benefits."

Indonesia to stand by Rohingyas: President Widodo praises Bangladesh

Visiting Indonesian President Joko Widodo has said Bangladesh has set an example of humanity by sheltering over a million displaced people from the Rakhine State and assured of staying beside the Rohingyas.

He highly appreciated Bangladesh and its people for the generosity and humanitarian gesture.



"Bangladesh truly deserves appreciation for that." The Indonesian president made the remarks while visiting Rohingya camps in the district on 28 January 2018.

Since August 25, over 688,000 Rohingyas have fled from Myanmar into Bangladesh. President Widodo visited Indonesian government-run field hospital, children education centre and water supply facilities in a camp. He also presented some toys to Rohingya children.

Indonesian First Lady Iriana Widodo and Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, among others, were present at that time.

Earlier, the Indonesian president reiterated his country's support to safe, dignified return of the displaced people to Rakhine. President Widodo appreciated Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina for sheltering over a million displaced persons from Rakhine State.

Vote for 'boat', PM urges people in Sylhet

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has sought vote for "boat", the electoral symbol of the Awami League, to make Bangladesh a developed and prosperous country.

Sheikh Hasina was addressing a public rally, organised by the district AL, at Sylhet Alia Madrasa ground in Sylhet on 30 January 2018. Formally launching the party's election campaign, she urged the voters to remain alert against terrorism, militancy and corruption.



She said Awami League means development... Bangladesh will be a developed and prosperous country. The people of Bangladesh will move forward with dignity in the global arena. It's our goal. To achieve the goal, we want vote for 'boat' in the next national polls to be held in December.

Mentioning that the "boat" symbol brought the country's independence and showed the path of prosperity, she said the "boat" was taking Bangladesh towards the path of development.

"When the Awami League comes to power, the country sees development. But the BNP-Jamaat alliance men, who are looters, killers and arsonists, know how to destroy."

The PM alleged that the BNP indulges in militancy and terrorism whenever it comes to power. "When the Awami League remains in power, Bangladesh earns fame and gets awards. But when the BNP stays in power, Bangladesh is condemned."

During the "violence by the BNP" in those three years, some 500 people were killed, more than 3,036 suffered burn injuries as well as 3,252 buses, 29 trains, nine launches and 70 government offices were torched, she added.

Bangladesh, said the AL chief, became a role model of development in the world and its people attained dignity as her party was voted to power.

About militancy, she said Islam, a religion of peace, never supports militancy and terrorism. "Those who kill innocent people in the name of Islam will never go to heaven."

She urged all, including parents, teachers, religious leaders and guardians, to check whether their children were deviating from the right path.

The premier opened 18 development projects and laid the foundation stones of 17 others by unveiling plaques from the meeting venue.

Earlier, Hasina offered fateha at the shrines of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA), Hazrat Shah Paran (RA) and Hazrat Gazi Borhan Uddin (RA) in the city.

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