

Staff Reporter Bangladesh urged Bhutan to consider it as a partner in its future hydro-power projects as Dhaka and Thimpu on Saturday agreed to bridge the existing trade gap between two countries through the expansion of trade and commerce. The request came at the official bilateral talks between Bangladesh and Bhutan at Prime Minister's Office. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Bhutanese counterpart Tshering Tobgay led their respective sides at the meeting. After the meeting, PM's Press Secretary AKM Shameem Chowdhuri briefed reporters. He said Hasina told the meeting that Bhutan has huge potentials for production of hydro-electricity which can make a significant contribution to the country's economy by exporting the surplus power to its neighbour. "We're trying hard for energy security to continue our pace of sustainable development. We're hopeful that Bhutan's untapped hydro-power potentials would come to meet our growing energy needs. I would request you to consider Bangladesh in your future hydro-power projects." She also mentioned that Bangladesh is confident that Bhutan will take care not to allow its hydro-electric projects on the common rivers to have adverse effect on Bangladesh. The Press Secretary said both the leaders stressed enhancing the trade between the two countries for reducing the existing gap as Bangladesh currently exports items worth Tk 20 crore while imports goods worth Tk 175 crore. Hasina said Bangladesh has unilaterally offered Bhutan to use Chittagong and Mongla seaports as also Lalmonirhat and Saidpur airports. "You're also welcome to use our Paira seaport which is coming up." The Bangladesh Prime Minister said there remains much scope to intensify cooperation in trade and commerce between the two countries. "Now we need more trade facilitation measures for deeper market access." To enhance trade with Bhutan Bangladesh, she said, Bangladesh has taken a number of measures, including development of trade infrastructure along its border. "These have resulted in a tremendous increase in Bhutanese export to Bangladesh. But flow of our products remains quite low. We hope that Bhutan would allow entry of more Bangladesh products into its market," Hasina said. She mentioned that Bangladesh has so many products like readymade garments, ceramics, pharmaceuticals, jute and jute products, leather goods, toiletries, chemicals and seasonal vegetables that would meet Bhutan's needs. Saying that Bangladesh strongly believe in regional cooperation, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina said connectivity remains the most crucial issue to enhance regional cooperation. Bangladesh needs to establish itself as the hub of regional connectivity so as to ensure seamless connectivity to the region and beyond. Putting emphasis on enhancing cooperation in flood control and flood migration, she said more reliable flood forecast data from Bhutan would help Bangladesh tackle floods in the Brahmaputra. The Bhutanese Prime Minister greeted Sheikh Hasina for being elected again in the last general elections. He said Bhutan needs skilled workers from Bangladesh, especially doctors. In reply Hasina requested him to enhance the wages of doctors. Tshering Tobgay also requested his Bangladesh counterpart to use bolder instead of bricks in different construction projects in Bangladesh to preserve ecological balance. He lauded the visionary leadership in running a democratic government - as well as in the region. Earlier, while the Bhutanese Prime Minister arrived at the Prime Minister Office (PMO) Sheikh Hasina along with her delegation members welcome him at there. Both the Prime Ministers also had a tete-tete before the official talks. Finance Minister A M A Muhith, Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Foreign Minister A H Mahmud Ali, State Minister for Health Zahid Malek, State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid were at the Bangladesh delegation. Bhutanese Foreign Minister Rinzin Dorje, Economic Affairs Minister Norbu Wangchuk, director general of policy and planning division of Foreign Ministry Sonam Tobden Rabgye and chief urban designer/architect Tashi Penjor were on Bhutanese side.