

## Dhaka, Delhi agree to talk FTA after Oct

### Sinha flies in to sit with Morshed today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka and New Delhi yesterday agreed to talk free trade agreement (FTA) in October as top-level officials of two sides met on the first day of the Joint Economic Council meet.

The meeting, sixth in the roll and being held after six years, also discussed the framework of transit. However, the discussion did not roll on to any conclusion.

Dhaka raised the huge trade deficit tilted in favour of Delhi and voiced its concern over various trade barriers -- both tariff and non-tariff -- posed by India.

"We will discuss the FTA after the fifth WTO ministerial meeting

in September," Indian External Affairs Secretary Kanwal Sibal who led his team told journalists after the meeting.

About the trade issues, he said: "These are of real concern for Bangladesh and will be addressed during signing of the FTA. Bangladesh will get privileges as a least developed country."

"The discussion was fruitful," said Economic Relations Division Secretary Mirza Tafazzel Beg who led the Bangladesh side to the meet. "We discussed a wide range of issues including trade, commerce, transport and energy. But nothing has been finalised."

The meeting was held at the National Economic Council con-

ference room at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar. A 15-member Indian team and an about 20-member Bangladesh side including Foreign Secretary Shamsheer Mobin Chowdhury and Commerce Secretary Suhel Ahmad met from 9:30am till 5:00pm with a lunch break.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan and his Indian counterpart Yashwant Sinha will sit today at 10:00am at the same venue and will issue a joint statement at the end of the talks.

In his arrival statement, Sinha said: "The people and the government of India attach the greatest

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PHOTO: STAR

A woman cooks food on a platform as floodwaters slosh beneath at Dhunat in Bogra yesterday. Flood situation turned worse with major rivers marking further rise in water level.

## Rivers rise relentlessly

### Diarrhoea breaks out in north

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Monsoon rains and onrush of swirling inflow of water from upstream have further worsened the spell of floods and waterborne diseases have spread among hundreds of people.

The floods that became all but regular in Bangladesh have left around two lakh people homeless and 10 lakh more cut off this year.

Two more children died of diarrhoea in Dimla upazila in Nilphamari yesterday, as waterborne diseases were spreading fast with gradual recession of floodwaters in the areas that

reported slight improvement in the situation.

The flood situation in Jamalpur, Pabna, Tangail, Manikganj, Munshiganj, Narsingdi, Narayanganj, Kishoreganj, Rajbari and Madaripur continued to worsen and may go down more notches, as the Ganges is likely to rise further.

The Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC) said the flood situation in Gaibandha, Bogra and Sirajganj are still unchanged and more lowlands in Dhaka, Faridpur and Sariatpur are likely to be swamped.

The flood watch has reported a

likely improvement of the situation in Kurigram, Panchagarh, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat and Rangpur.

Meantime, the cabinet at a meeting yesterday reviewed the o v e r a l l

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## Sadarghat staff get one week to put things in order

RAFIQ HASAN

Freshly posted officials and employees of the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) at Sadarghat yesterday were given one week's time to put the prime launch terminal in order.

Shipping Minister Akbar Hossain called up the new band of staff at his office and spelt out the warning yesterday, a day after he was reprimanded by the prime minister for his failure to ensure safety of passengers in riverways.

They have also been asked to immediately implement five specific tasks or find their jobs on the line.

The responsibilities are checking overloading of passengers and goods in launches, supervising

location of passengers and goods, examining availability of life saving equipment in vessels, preventing vendors from entering the terminal areas and saving passengers from the harassment by porters.

"You have to solve a national problem, and if you fail to deliver your job would be at stake," the minister warned.

He also asked them not to give in to threat or strike by the launch owners.

"Your prime responsibility is to see whether the passenger vessels are complying with the government rules. If they do not, file cases and take legal actions," said Akbar, asking them to exercise total authority for maintaining discipline and saving lives.

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## Army may supervise launch terminals

### Akbar says not at this moment

STAR REPORT

The government is considering deployment of special forces including army at Sadarghat launch terminal and other major terminals to help the civil administration restore

discipline and ensure safety of marine passengers, sources indicated.

The situation at launch terminals including those at Barisal and Bhola has virtually gone beyond con-

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## Sunken launch spotted 120ft deep in Meghna

BSS, Chandpur

The search operators traced the sunken vessel MV Nasrin-1 yesterday afternoon in the river Meghna, after a six-day long operation.

The commander of the navy ship BNS Shaibal, Captain Shahiduzzaman, confirmed that the sunken launch had been spotted.

Additional Deputy Commissioner (ADC) of Chandpur Md. Nuruzzaman at a press conference said the sunken launch was

traced at a depth of 120 feet in the river Meghna, 150 feet off its bank.

The launch is covered with sands, he said.

The divers of the navy and the BIWTA said it was not possible to salvage the launch, as the river was very turbulent. "We cannot dive more than 50 feet into the water due to strong current," they added.

The BIWTA salvage ships Rustam and Hamza can jointly lift only 120 tonnes but the weight of the sunken

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## Daily Star editor serves legal notice on SQ Chy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The editor-publisher of The Daily Star, Mahfuz Anam, through his lawyer, Dr Kamal Hossain, has served a legal notice on Salauddin Quader Chowdhury MP for making false and defamatory statements in an article under his signature published in The Daily Inqilab on July 2, 2003. A similar notice was also served on AMM Bahauddin and ASM Bakibillah, the editor and the publisher of The Daily Inqilab.

In his legal notice Mahfuz Anam said that Chowdhury in the signed article made, without naming, totally fabricated and defamatory charges against him through thinly-veiled, indirect yet clear

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## Govt swings between EPZ unionism and wrap-up threat

NAZMUL AHSAN

The government is in a dilemma over allowing trade unionism in the export processing zones (EPZs) from January 1, a deadline set two years ago, official sources said.

The indecision stems from threats from a number of foreign investors who said they would withdraw from the EPZs and go to the courts, both domestic and international, if unionism was allowed.

Investors at a number of recent meetings with the Bangladesh Export Processing Zone Authority (BEPZA) voiced their discontent and pointed out that when they invested in the EPZs, the government promised in writing that unionism has no space at the specialised zones.

On the other hand, the US reminded the government last month of its promise made with the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to allow

trade union activities.

"How can we allow unionism in the EPZs as the foreign investors had been assured by the government that the zones are free of such activities?" Executive Chairman of BEPZA Brigadier General (rtd) Mofizur Rahman told The Daily Star.

The BEPZA chairman said he needs more time to allow trade unions in the EPZs.

The US reminder came following a petition by the American Federation of Labour and Congress of Industrial Organisation (AFL-CIO) to the USTR a couple of months back.

The petition urged the USTR to withdraw the Generalised System of Preference (GSP) facilities given to Bangladesh unless labour rights were established by January 1. Bangladesh exported items worth \$43 million in FY02 under the GSP facilities to the US.

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## Lawyers stay out of SC for second day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The lawyers of the Supreme Court yesterday boycotted Appellate Division, protesting the appointment of Justice M M Ruhul Amin to the Appellate Division who superseded his senior colleague at the High Court Division.

The government appointed Justice M M Ruhul Amin to the Appellate Division from the High Court Division on last Saturday though Justice Amirul Islam is the seniormost judge of the High Court Division.

The lawyers also stayed out of both the divisions of the court Sunday.

The Bar Association in its adjourned general meeting yesterday took a decision to consult its

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### Announcement

Today's edition of The Daily Star includes both Star City and your regular Lifestyle supplements. Star City will now be coming to you three times a week.