

# PM's India trip eyes warm ties

## FROM PAGE 1

Cooperation (Saarc) in Dhaka in November last year and Indian premier's visit to Dhaka created an atmosphere and set the stage for Khaleda's long awaited tour to India.

Nothing has happened in the last four years regarding resolving the contentious bilateral issues and there were ups and downs in the relations in the last few months when the two sides began high level exchanges of visits and meetings took place in Dhaka and New Delhi.

Official sources said Dhaka would take up its main concerns like huge trade deficit, sharing of the waters of the common rivers and the Indian river linking project, border-related issues like smuggling of drugs and arms, long-standing problems of land-boundary demarcation, handing of adverse possession and enclaves and fencing of border violating Indo-Bangladesh treaties. Bangladesh is concerned about criminals taking shelter in India as well as anti-Bangladesh campaign by certain groups in India.

Highly placed sources said Bangladesh and India have a huge trade deficit of about \$1.5 billion in favour of India. Dhaka has long been pressing New Delhi to reduce the trade imbalance by opening Indian market for Bangladeshi products by removing tariffs and non-tariff barriers.

India's export to Bangladesh is over \$ 2 billion while informal exports are believed to account for

another \$ 2 billion a year. While Bangladesh's export is around \$ 144 million annually.

Officials said Bangladesh has given maximum trade facilities to India and Indian products have flooded the Bangladesh market. But India does not give Bangladeshi products access by imposing tariff, para-tariff and other barriers.

India has been suggesting Delhi-Dhaka Free Trade Agreement (FTA) to remove the trade gap.

For New Delhi, a major concern is security along the porous 4,200-km-long border between India and Bangladesh where illegal crossings are common.

At the upcoming talks between Khaleda and Manmohan, Indian sources said New Delhi would push for accords on extradition, express concern about the "presence and activities of Indian insurgent groups in Bangladesh," halting illegal migration from Bangladesh, allowing border fencing and development work to be undertaken.

Bangladesh reiterated its stand on not allowing any terrorist groups operating from the country against India.

India is also expected to ask Bangladesh to allow the use of Chittagong Port, introduction of Agartala-Akhaura train service, and the go-ahead for tri-nation gas pipeline.

A range of security related concerns such as killings of Bangladeshi nationals in the border

areas, barbed-wire fencing violating border treaties, India's allegation of north-eastern rebels operating from Bangladesh territory, and illegal migration from Bangladesh affected cooperation for last several years.

Sharing of waters of the common rivers and Bangladesh's concerns about the Indian River Linking Project have long been remaining unresolved. Bangladesh has been opposed to India's plan of river networking due to fears of its being deprived of its share of water. India, however, assured Bangladesh government that India would not take a unilateral decision on the river linking issue.

The \$2.5 billion Myanmar-Bangladesh-India pipeline project is another area of contention between the two countries. Dhaka wants transit facilities through India for hydroelectric power from Nepal and Bhutan to Bangladesh, a corridor for trade between the two Himalayan kingdoms, and measures to reduce the bilateral trade imbalance before signing this agreement.

But for India, these issues are bilateral matters and it considers the preconditions unreasonable for the "commercial" pipeline project especially when India is ready to pay an expected transit fee of \$125 million annually to Bangladesh.

Diplomatic sources said Khaleda Zia's visit, though belated, is expected to bring a significant change in the Indo-Bangladesh ties

that could not happen earlier for various reasons.

"Anything can be discussed by the two prime ministers but Bangladesh will try to address the large trade gap issue with the two countries, removal of trade barriers, sharing water of common rivers and ensuring a peaceful border," said a high official of the ministry of foreign affairs.

"There are no insurmountable issues between us (India and Bangladesh)," Singh told reporters during the Saarc Summit in Dhaka, adding that, "India would do nothing to hurt the interest of Bangladesh and by helping Bangladesh, we would be helping ourselves."

During her meeting with Singh in November, officials said Khaleda had told him Bangladesh wants the "best of relations" with India and made it very clear that Bangladesh was ready to resolve all outstanding issues with India amicably through talks on the basis of friendship, trust and understanding.

An Indian diplomat in Dhaka said some positive steps have been taken by Bangladesh to remove Indian concerns that have been souring the relations between the two neighbours.

He said New Delhi is committed to strong bilateral relations with Dhaka and added that India and Bangladesh must remain closely engaged and work together in the fast changing world.

# Another body found

## FROM PAGE 1

Identified as Nazrul Islam Nazu, 35, who was working on aluminium fittings on the ground floor of the multi-storey building during the disaster on Saturday morning.

"More than 75 hours have passed since the building collapsed and now the chance of anyone surviving in this heat seems very thin," fire brigade Deputy Director Selim Newaz Bhuiyan told The Daily Star yesterday.

"But of course we are still continuing our search. Miracles often happen—people may still be found alive inside the wreckage," he said, adding that they will not give up hope until clearing the entire rubble of the 20,000-square-foot building.

Sources said 40 percent of the rescue work was completed until yesterday afternoon. Officials of the army and fire brigade who are supervising the rescue operation said they would need at most four days to clear the rubble.

"The operation would have taken less time if we could have advanced from all four sides. We are at work only from east and south sides of the building as we cannot take the excavators and other large equipment to the two other sides," Brigadier General Nizam Ahmed, head of the rescue operation, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The Phoenix building that previously housed a garment factory collapsed on Saturday when labourers were working for its conversion into a 500-bed hospital.

Some injured workers recovered from the debris told The Daily Star that the building failed to carry the load of the whole structure as the authorities removed several walls from the ground

floor to make a large hall room.

Construction experts, engineers, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkho (Rajuk) officials and the six members of the probe body investigating the accident also made similar observations.

Over 500 army personnel and fire fighters have been carrying out the operation since the collapse, drilling through the floors of the collapsed building to reach the ground floor.

Brigadier Nizam said, "We have reached the ground floor at some points while our men are working on the first and second floors at other sides."

The firefighters were seen pumping oxygen into the wreckage and asking any survivor on loudspeakers to call out for help.

Meanwhile, no one turned up until last evening to identify the two bodies kept at the Dhaka Medical College morgue since Saturday.

The bodies of a woman, aged around 45, and a man, 30, started decomposing on Monday. Doctors said the bodies are decomposing fast as they have been kept without any refrigeration—which the morgue lacks—and soon it would be difficult to identify them.

The hospital authorities have decided to hand over the bodies to Anjuman Mufidul Islam today for burial.

The detectives who are investigating the case filed in connection with the building collapse failed to arrest any of the seven absconding accused, including owner of the building Deen Mohammad.

The police arrested accused manager (finance) of Phoenix Fabrics Rezaul Karim Faruq on Saturday night. Detective Branch (DB) officials told The Daily Star that they raided several points in Dhaka but did not find any of the accused. "Two DB teams have gone out of Dhaka today to raid their possible hideouts and village homes," a DB officer said yesterday, seeking anonymity.

## Confusion over building height

The chief engineer of Rajuk, who maintained until Monday that the building was six-storey high, told yesterday that it was a five and a half-storey building with a tin-shed structure on the roof.

A display board at the army information centre described the building as five-storeyed. Brigadier Nizam, who is coordinating the rescue operations, told The Daily Star that the building was four-storey high with the tin-shed structure on the fifth floor.

Fire brigade Director (operation and maintenance) Zahir Uddin Mohammad Babar also said it was four-storey high with the makeshift structure of corrugated tin on the top floor.

# 50 shops gutted at Dohar

## BDNEWS, Dhaka

A devastating fire gutted over 50 grocery shops at Meghlabazar in Dohar upazila in Dhaka on Monday night.

According to fire fighters, the fire broke out at about 10:00pm and three fire units managed to control the fire after five hours of frantic efforts.

Huge properties were destroyed in the blaze, shop owners said.

Fire service sources said no casualty was reported and the cause of the fire could not be known immediately.