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PM starts 'new phase in friendship' tour of India

Hopes trip will improve cooperation



Indian Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahmed, centre, and Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, right, welcome Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in New Delhi as she arrives there on a three-day visit yesterday.

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA and REZAUL KARIM from New Delhi

As Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday arrived in New Delhi in her first state visit to India in about a decade and half, the two countries set an optimistic atmosphere.

In a statement on arrival Khaleda expressed hope that her trip here would usher in a "new phase in friendship" and cooperation while Indian Finance Minister P Chidambaram hinted at providing greater market access to Bangladesh goods.

"During my visit, I look forward to very candid and constructive discussions with our friends in India," she said.

"I hope that, as a result of our discussions, it would be possible for us to create conditions for perceptible improvement in the content of our cooperative relations," observed the Bangladesh premier. Earlier she was received

Delhi hints at easy access of goods

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Setting a positive note to Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's visit, India yesterday hinted at its readiness to facilitate easy access of goods from the neighbouring countries, saying New Delhi is capable of absorbing exports from there.

"We need to take a broader view at our neighbourhood rather than look at it in terms of rupees and paisa," Finance Minister P Chidambaram said at a Confederation of Indian Industry function in New Delhi.

Noting that India is a bigger economy, he said, "We must be able to absorb their (neighbouring countries) exports. What is the point in calling ourselves a regional economic power if we can't help our neighbours?"

"Bangladesh remains poor... What will happen if more people from Bangladesh migrate to India. And that is what is happening," Chidambaram said.

Bangladesh is seeking removal of tax barriers by India to allow its goods' easy access.

During Zia's visit, the two countries are likely to sign three economic pacts including double taxation avoidance agreement and

Citizens' group floated to campaign for clean candidates

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Civil society members yesterday floated a citizens' group to prepare a mid-term development vision for the country and launch a campaign for electing honest and competent

candidates in the next general elections.

The group will also put pressure on major political parties to nominate honest and competent people for the electoral race and work together for a free and fair voting

with the participation of all parties.

Prof Rehman Sobhan, chairman of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), has been made convener of the body styled 'Citizens' Group for a Vision for Bangladesh'.

Yunus unveils formula The citizen's group

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Renowned economist and Managing Director of Grameen Bank Prof Muhammad Yunus has called for a movement to elect competent candidates in the next general elections to continue democratic process and economic development of the country.

He also presented a formula for the movement to put pressure on the major political parties for

nominating competent candidates.

Speaking at the Citizen Dialogue for Election 2007 yesterday at Dhaka Hotel Sheraton, he detailed his 12-point formula that includes nominating symbolic candidates in the constituencies.

"We have to take preparations from now on for resisting corrupt and incompetent people from entering the next parliament," he said.

Convenor of the Citizens' Group for a Vision for Bangladesh is Prof Rehman Sobhan and Member Secretary Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya.

The members are Fazle Hasan Abed, chairperson of Brac, Abul Ahsan, former secretary general of Saarc, Dr Anisuzzaman of Dhaka University, Samson H Chowdhury,

News analysis

Eyeing turnaround in diplomacy

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

India's neighbourhood diplomacy is set to be on full display when Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia holds talks with her Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh in order to seek a turnaround in bilateral relations marked by a trust deficit and differences in views on a host of issues, officials and analysts here said.

They also said that it is the economic component of the bilateral

ELECTORAL REFORMS

Govt invites opposition to form committee

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has officially offered a proposal for dialogue with the opposition on the formation of a committee comprising leaders from the ruling alliance and the opposition parties to discuss the opposition's proposal for electoral reforms.

Instructed by the prime minister, BNP's Secretary General also



Justice Habibur Rahman speaks at the dialogue "National Election 2007: The Civil Society Initiative in Accountable Development Efforts" organised by CPD, Prothom Alo and The Daily Star at Dhaka Sheraton Hotel yesterday.

Bangladesh too good for Kenya

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh produced another ruthless professional display to dispose of an exposure-starved Kenya by nine wickets in the second one-day international at the Khulna Divisional Stadium yesterday.

The easy sail of the Tigers in front of a capacity crowd in the southeast port city gave Bangladesh an unbeatable 2-0 lead in the four-match series after their record 131-run success in the opening match at Bogra.

The home side never looked behind after local lad Syed Rasel set the tone of a lop-sided affair by picking up three early wickets that saw the Kenyan's eventually bowled out for meagre 161.

Although Kenya without their



Aftab Ahmed drives as Kenyan wicketkeeper Kennedy Otieno watches at the Bir Shrestha Motiur Rahman Stadium in Khulna yesterday. Aftab went on to score an unbeaten 59.

Media hyped visit

REZAUL KARIM, From New Delhi

Mainstream Indian media yesterday gave wide coverage to Prime Minister Khaleda Zia's three-day visit to India.

All the mainstream newspapers carried news and reports raising expectations that the visit will lead to improved bilateral ties between the two neighbours.

Three major newspapers -- The Hindu, The Indian Express and The Asian Age -- brought out special supplements welcoming the Bangladesh prime minister, who is also the chairperson of Saarc. They also highlighted some of the development activities in Bangladesh.

The Asian Age supplement headline read "Vibrant Bangladesh: Welcome Prime Minister Khaleda Zia", The Indian Express "Bangladesh: A Country of Immense Potential" and The Hindu headlined "Resurgent Bangladesh: Welcome Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia on

Rahman himself led raid to kill AL leader

He talks about his operations, arrest of Bangla Bhai in 2002

STAR REPORT

Jama'at al Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) supremo Abdur Rahman has admitted that he himself led a failed operation to kill an Awami League leader in Mollahat in Bagerhat in August 2002.

Rahman on March 19 told interrogators a 13-member JMB team, which also included Bangla Bhai, chased AL leader Tarapodo Poddar of Gaola village but could not have him due to locals' resistance.

As the AL leader managed to escape, the attackers took shelter at the house of a JMB activist. Police had arrested six militants including

Bangla Bhai, but Rahman evaded arrest, the JMB chief told the interrogators.

The militant kingpin also said 20 JMB cadres in Bagerhat are looking for an opportunity to launch bomb attacks on some specific targets.

Meantime, the sedition case filed against JMB's seven Majlishe-Shura members on March 13 was transferred yesterday to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of police.

Rahman and Bangla Bhai were shown arrested in a case filed for August 17 serial bomb blasts in Bogra yesterday where a court ordered reinvestigation into the case.

BAGERHAT

The JMB supremo and 12 others including Bangla Bhai stormed the house of AL leader Tarapodo at Gaola on the night of August 16, 2002, reports staff correspondent in Khulna.

Rahman said they attempted to slaughter Tarapodo as he had protested holding of a secret JMB meeting at Gaola the same evening.

"It was a rainy night," Abdur Rahman told the members of Task Force for Interrogation (TFI) in Dhaka while being quizzed about August 17 blast in Bagerhat and militants' training in the case.

4 madrasa boys held for killing 11-yr-old boy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Sylhet police arrested four students of Fatehpur Madrasa in Sadar upazila early Sunday in connection with the killing of an 11-year boy of the same madrasa.

The agreees are Sarwar Alam, 18, Asaduzzaman, 17, Mujibur Rahman, 17 and Layek Miah, 18.

The victim Belal Hossain, a student of class six, went to join a Waj Mehfil in the madrasa on Saturday night and never returned home. Later locals learned Sarwar had called him out of the Waj Mehfil on that night. They also found Belal's ID card with him and suspecting his involvement in Belal's disappearance they handed him over to the police.

Sarwar confessed to police that he along with the three had hacked the boy to death and then dumped

Banks write off Tk 10,300cr since 2003

REZAUL KARIM BYRON

The commercial banks have written off Tk 10,300 crore from their bad loans since 2003 until December 31 last year.

According to available information, a number of these banks have however recovered about 1 percent to 4 percent of the written off loans.

The nationalised commercial banks have written off Tk 3,459 crore, the private commercial banks Tk 3,900 crore, development financial institutes Tk 2,800 crore and foreign commercial banks Tk 141 crore.

According to a write-off policy Bangladesh Bank made in 2003 to reduce bad loans, a bank must keep a provision of the same amount against a bad loan to be written off.

Besides, the banks will have to

continue their efforts to recover the loan by filing cases against the defaulters.

Banking sources said they have written off the bad loans according to the central bank's guidelines. At the same time they have also undertaken various steps to recover the written-off loans and report to their boards about the progress every three months.

Of the entire volume of written off loans, about Tk 6,000 crore was written off by 2003 and the rest in the following years.

Information related to the written off loans could not be gathered from all the banks. However, The Daily Star obtained information from some of the banks that have written off huge bad loans.

Sonal Bank wrote off Tk 947

crore until December 31 and recovered Tk 24.88 crore, which is 2.63 percent of the amount.

Janata Bank wrote off Tk 954 crore, while it recovered Tk 18 crore, which is 1.88 percent of its written off loans.

Agrani Bank wrote off Tk 973 crore and recovered Tk 28 crore, which is 2.88 percent of its written off loans.

Rupali Bank wrote off Tk 585 crore and recovered Tk 24.36 crore or 4.10 percent of its written off loans.

Pubali Bank wrote off Tk 364 crore and recovered Tk 15 crore, which is 4.12 percent of its written off loans.

Uttara Bank wrote off Tk 625 crore and recovered Tk 10 crore or 1.6 percent of its written off loans.

Debate in JS body over Eden College chaos

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The ruling BNP lawmakers yesterday locked horns with an Awami League (AL) lawmaker over the situation at the Eden University College and rejected the opposition lawmaker's demand for formation of a parliamentary probe body to resolve the deadlock in the college.

At a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on education ministry, the ruling BNP lawmakers also defended the government from criticised for the chaos in the college.

"The government has taken action against the principal and tried to bring normalcy at the college," committee member and BNP lawmaker Abu Yousuf Mohammad Khalilur Rahman said after AL lawmaker Atiur Rahman

Obituary

We regret to inform that Advocate Kazi Golam Mahboob, passed away on 19 March 2006 at 10:17 am (Innallillahi..... Rajiun) at the age of 78. Late Mr. Mahboob left behind his wife, two sons, two daughters, in-laws and grandchildren. He was the Conveyner of the 1952 language movement, a former President of the Supreme Court Bar Association and a renowned advocate. Friends, relatives and well-wishers are requested to attend the Milad Mahfil to pray for his departed soul on 22 March 2006, after Asr prayer at his residence, Road # 10, House # 5, Dhanmondi, Dhaka, Tel # 911 4992.