



JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ

Dhaka, Delhi to maintain high-level political talks

REZAUL KARIM, from New Delhi

Both Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh have agreed on the need to maintain high-level political dialogue between their two countries.

They also underpinned the common desire "to strengthen and consolidate" the existing friendly ties between Bangladesh and India based on their shared history and culture and wide-ranging people-to-people relations.

The current visit of the Bangladesh PM has provided both countries with "the opportunity to continue and sustain their high-level political dialogue", said an eight-point joint press release



Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Indian Minister for Commerce and Industry Kamal Nath at the luncheon meeting jointly organised by three leading Indian trade bodies at Hotel Taj Mahal in New Delhi yesterday.

issued yesterday in New Delhi on conclusion of Khaleda's three-day visit to India from March 20.

The joint release said Khaleda's visit is also "testimony to the highest priority attached by the two countries to the promotion of their bilateral relations in all aspects".

It said during her visit, the Bangladesh PM held comprehensive discussions with the Indian PM on "the entire gamut of bilateral relations". They also discussed regional and international issues of mutual interest.

The joint release said two agreements were signed during the visit of the Bangladesh PM: the Revised Trade Agreement and the Agreement for Mutual Cooperation

DIALOGUE OFFER AL sends letter to BNP for clarification

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

In reply to ruling BNP's official invitation to discuss the oppositions' proposed electoral reforms, Awami League yesterday sent a letter to the ruling party seeking some clarifications including the proposed committee's format, its mandate, time frame and the number of its members.

"Specific format of the committee, its time frame, eligibilities for committee members and their number were not pointed out in

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Khaleda recalls India's role in Liberation War

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia has appreciated India's assistance to her country during the Liberation War of 1971.

"Mr Prime Minister, the people of Bangladesh launched an epic Liberation War in 1971. This finally resulted in the emergence of an independent Bangladesh. We deeply cherish the memory of your country's contribution to our Liberation War," she said in her speech at a banquet hosted by Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in New Delhi Tuesday night.

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Irrigation strained as water table drops

REAZ AHMAD

The predominantly groundwater-based irrigation system in the country has reached a critical phase with croplands in many areas going out of the reach of shallow-level aquifer due to fast depleting groundwater table.

The country's first-ever groundwater zoning map prepared recently comes up with a daunting picture of the water table falling to such an extent that about 3 lakh shallow tube-wells (STWs) out of a total of 11 lakh are unable to lift irrigation water.

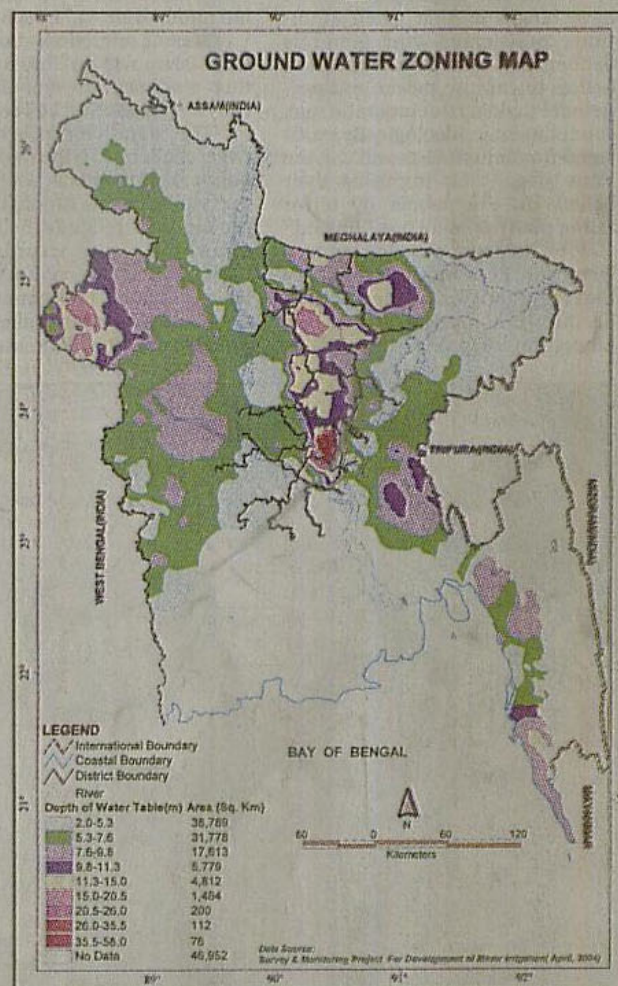
Latest official statistics show that 8.9 lakh hectares out of 31.5 lakh hectares of irrigated lands in the last Rabi season in the country went almost beyond irrigation, making over 3 lakh STWs virtually redundant.

The STWs can draw groundwater for irrigation purposes provided the water table is within a depth of 2 to 7.6 metres. But the groundwater zoning map shows that the groundwater level in nearly 9 lakh hectares of cropland in northeastern, northwestern and central regions of the country fell to a depth of 7.6 to 11.3 metres.

"Farmers can no longer draw irrigation water from these regions using STWs at ground-level, rather, they have to further dig the earth and set their STWs in a certain depth for reaching the falling water table. That is what we call deep-set shallow tube-wells," said engineer Md Eftekarul Alam, one of the architects of the groundwater zoning map.

The map has been prepared over the last 15 months using the last 35 years' aquifer

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Khaleda invites Advani to visit Bangladesh

REZAUL KARIM, from New Delhi

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday invited Indian Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha LK Advani to visit Bangladesh to see for himself the actual scenario and the progress being made in Bangladesh.

The Bangladesh prime minister made the invitation when the

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PM MEETS INDIAN BUSINESS LEADERS Invites investment, seeks to bridge trade gap

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA and REZAUL KARIM, from New Delhi

Bangladesh Prime Minister Khaleda Zia yesterday wrapped up her three-day official visit to India inviting investment from that country and suggesting strategic partnership between investors and traders of the two countries in key areas including information and communications technology (ICT).

Addressing captains of Indian industry and business at Taj Mansingh Hotel here, she voiced concern over the ever-growing trade gap between India and Bangladesh saying such a situation is 'hardly sustainable' and urged India to facilitate preferential duty-free access to Bangladeshi exports.

She also sought dismantling of

various non-tariff barriers to exports from Bangladesh to Indian market and improvement of land port facilities on Indian side of the border.

Khaleda said Indian investors could take advantage of a 'very attractive and investment friendly regime' in Bangladesh, its growing market and its location as a link between South Asia and fast-growing South East Asia.

"The preferential access that Bangladesh enjoys in many developed markets can also be made use of. All these advantages make Bangladesh a significant investment destination," Khaleda said adding, "We welcome our friends abroad, particularly those from India, to take advantage of Bangladesh's favourable investment friendly regime and the

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Bird flu poses threat to Bangladesh

Fears UN

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The United Nations has expressed fears that bird flu (Avian Influenza) poses an imminent threat to Bangladesh in the wake of spread of the disease in India and Myanmar.

Bangladesh should urgently

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Tortured Shanta now faces criminal cases

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Two criminal cases were filed with a Dhaka court yesterday against Shahin Sultana Shanta, a victim of police brutality during a 14-party agitation on March 12, and her husband.

The two cases—one for "extortion" in Mohammadpur area and another for "theft" in Mirpur—were

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Bangla Bhai confesses to his atrocities in northern districts

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) operations commander Siddiqul Islam alias Bangla Bhai yesterday admitted to his atrocities in the northern districts in 2004, having punished people as per Islamic shariah in the name of eliminating outlaws.

The notorious militant leader also admitted to having enjoyed supports from the local adminis-

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Fires, stampede at Ctg RMG units

Tk 50cr goods gutted, 40 hurt

CU CORRESPONDENT

Goods worth over Tk 50 crore were gutted in a devastating fire at a textile warehouse in the city's Kalurghat industrial area yesterday within 17 hours into another fire that broke out at Creaslan Sweater Ltd of the same owner on Tuesday evening.

The leaders of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)

suspect the fires at the two factories, both of which are fully compliant with safety rules, an act of "sabotage" and demanded probe into the matter.

With this latest incident, properties worth over Tk 70 crore were damaged in six fires at different garment and other industrial units in the port city since March 8.

Meanwhile, at least 40 workers were injured in a stampede caused

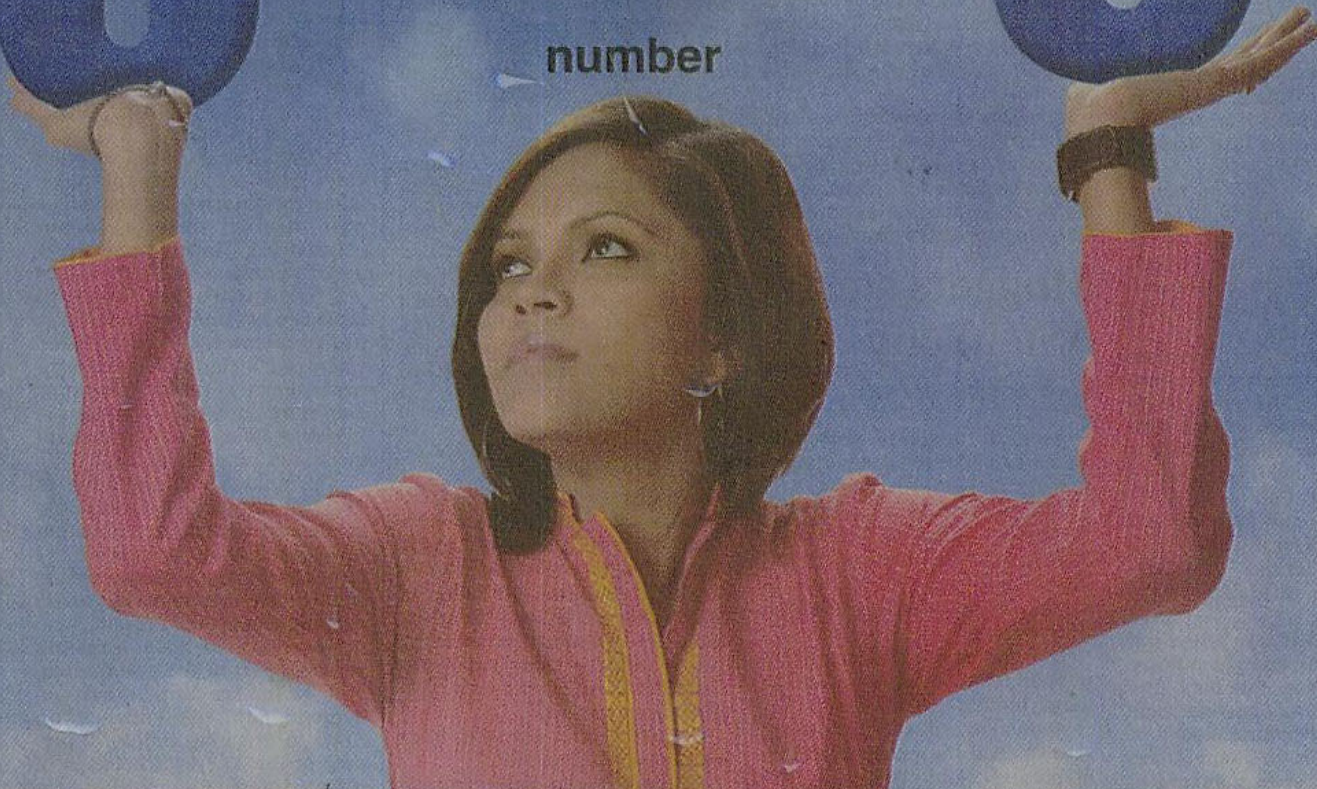
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