

High-ups in dark over Tarique-Aso meeting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Senior ministers and high officials of the government are taken aback and have been in the dark over an exclusive meeting between the visiting Japanese foreign minister Tarō Aso and Tarique Rahman, joint secretary general of ruling BNP and also the son of the prime minister, sources said.

Referring anonymity, a number of BNP leaders said that the high officials of the government were extremely secretive about Tarique Rahman and Tarō Aso's meeting because it was over setting up Tarique's private business enterprise.

The meeting was held at the Japanese foreign minister's hotel suite at around 2:40pm yesterday. State minister for home affairs Lutfozzaman Babar accompanied him.

The meeting organised by the foreign ministry lasted 20 minutes. Most of the leaders of the ruling party, even officials of the foreign

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Saarc ministers to talk disputes over Safta implementation

Dhaka hosts 2-day meet from Aug 1

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

An emergency meeting of commerce ministers of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) countries will be held in Dhaka on August 1-2 to discuss trade disputes among member countries over the implementation of South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) agreement.

Terming Pakistan's stand on the Safta agreement 'against letter and spirit', Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath told the Indian parliament yesterday that the Saarc ministerial meeting will take up for urgent consideration on the restricted list of 773 items for Indian exports issued by Islamabad despite it ratifying the accord with-

out any reservation.

"The notification of the Government of Pakistan is against the letter and spirit of the South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta) which has come into force from July 1 this year," Nath told the Lok Sabha during the Question Hour.

Voicing surprise over Pakistan's customs notification for Tariff Liberalisation Programme (TLP), which has been issued with a rider that it would be subject to its earlier import policy order, he said the emergency meeting of Safta Ministerial Council (SMC) in Dhaka on August 1-2 will discuss this important trade issue since it was not within the grouping's legal framework.

Referring to Pakistan's import

policy, Nath said imports into Pakistan from India were restricted to the items issued in a positive list by its commerce ministry, which currently consists only 773 items.

Observing that all member-states, including Pakistan, ratified Safta without any reservation, Nath said India had requested the Saarc Secretary General through a letter on July 7 to hold an urgent meeting of the seven member states.

As per the phased TLP of Safta, non-least developed contracting states -- India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka -- are to bring down tariffs to 20 per cent within two years.

Least developed contracting states -- Bangladesh, Bhutan, the Maldives and Nepal -- would bring

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PHOTO: AFP

The devastation at a neighbourhood in southern Beirut caused by Israeli air raids. Tel Aviv vowed to press on with its war on Hezbollah yesterday.

RAPE OF 5YR-OLD Flawed probe denies Tania of justice

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court while handing down the verdict in the sensational Tania rape case yesterday described the investigation as flawed and inadequate in sentencing the lone accused Obaidur Rahman Mora who is in custody for over eight years.

Judge Nurunnahar of the Third Special Tribunal for Prevention of Women and Children Repression acquitted Mora, as the charge brought against him was not proved.

Hailing from Nagarkanda of Faridpur Mora, 25, used to spend his days on the court premises selling fruits and other things. Later

he was arrested in connection with his involvement in raping Tania.

The tribunal directed the inspector general of police (IGP) to take departmental action against the investigation officer (IO) of the case for his negligence and reluctance to investigate the case.

Five-year-old Tania was raped inside the police control room adjacent to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court, Dhaka around 3:00pm on March 10, 1998.

After the judgement, Mora broke down in tears and asked The Daily Star who would give back the eight years of his life in jail custody. Moreover, his wife Aleya Begum and eight-year-old daughter

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Laxmipur bus plunge kills 15, injures 40

UNB, Laxmipur

Death toll from the bus accident at Noroigachhtala in Laxmipur Sadar upazila Monday night rose to 15 as five more bodies were found when the bus was salvaged yesterday morning, about 12 hours after the accident.

The Dhaka-bound bus from Laxmipur plunged into a roadside canal when its driver lost control over steering at about 11:45pm on Monday.

Police rushed to the spot and with the help of local people rescued 40 passengers alive. Ten of them were admitted to Luxmipur Sadar Hospital while 30 others were given first aid.

Fire Brigade team salvaged the bus yesterday morning from about

12 feet deep water.

Two victims, Sabuj, 18, and Moslehuddin, 24, were found stuck up with the rod of the window in their desperate attempt to come out of the sunken bus.

Eleven dead were identified as Haroon, 28, Qari Mujibullah, 35, Abdul Hamid Babul, 45, bus driver Mona, 50, bus helper Zahir, 22, Abdul Mannan, 25, Kalu Munshi, 70, Belal Hossain Babul, 38, Ibrahim, 38, Ismail, 30, and Harunur Rashid.

Survivors said the victims were mostly day labourers hailed from char areas of Ramgati upazila. Some of the survivors alleged that the bus was overloaded with about 60 passengers.

It is suspected that four to five passengers still remained missing.

By-polls in Dinajpur-3, Comilla-8 on Sept 7

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The by-elections to Dinajpur-3 and Comilla-8 parliamentary constituencies will be held on September 7, the Election Commission (EC) declared yesterday.

The EC Secretariat disclosed the by-election schedules in a gazette notification yesterday.

The EC has been compelled to conduct the by-elections as the government retreated from its move to amend the constitution incorporating a new provision for not holding by-election to a vacant seat if the tenure of parliament remains for 180 days or less.

The tenure of the current parliament will expire on October 27.

Seats in the two constituencies fell vacant following the deaths of ruling BNP lawmakers Khurshid Jahan Haque and Col (ret) Akbar Hossain last month.

August 13 was set the last date for submission of nomination papers that will be scrutinised the next day. The last date of withdrawal of candidature is August 22.

The deputy commissioners of Dinajpur and Comilla have been made the returning officers for the constituencies under their respective districts. Dinajpur sadar upazila nirbahi officer and Comilla sadar upazila nirbahi officer have been made the assistant returning officers.

EASTERN BYPASS

Revised feasibility report finalised

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Authorities finalised the revised feasibility report on the Dhaka Eastern Bypass, raising hopes that the 'second most important project in terms of national priority' may now be started, Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) sources said.

Now the 25-member inter-ministerial coordination committee formed six months ago, headed by the finance and planning minister, will have to convene a meeting and finalise the sources of Tk 2,475 crore required for it.

Officially known as Dhaka Integrated Flood Control Embankment Cum Eastern Bypass Road Multipurpose Project, it will encompass 124 square km area by a 30 km long embankment from Tongi Railway Bridge in the north to Kanchpur Bridge in the southwest of the capital. Seven ministries, with the water resources ministry being the head, would implement the project. A UK-based consultant and its local associates have updated all previous studies on the project.

An inter-ministerial meeting in July, 2005 classified the project as the second most important project in terms of national priority to reduce poverty. The whole concept

of the project is to protect the people of this area from recurring floods, so that their living conditions could improve.

Meanwhile, land developers have so far defied all bans and continued to fill up vast areas, earmarked in the city's master plan for flood retention plains. The lack of government initiative to save natural canals and water retention ponds in the 124 square kilometres has raised fears that the area would become "uninhabitable" as waste and rain water generated in the protected area would create permanent water logging.

Most of the low-lying lands in the bypass project area are now under the grips of private housing companies and individuals. From Khilkhet to Kanchpur along the river Balu massive signboards have been installed stating the start of mega residential projects.

Official sources in the BWDB said in a meeting held in October 2004, Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk) was asked to submit the Detail Area Plan (DAP) for the entire area within four months. They said with the DAP it would have been easier for the government to implement a

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PBCP cadre killed in Rab 'encounter'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

An armed activist of the outlawed Purba Banglar Communist Party (PBCP) Janajuddho faction, Ripon Sarder, 30, was killed in an 'encounter' with the members of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) during early hours yesterday in an arms recovery operation at Alka village under Phultala upazila.

He was arrested earlier from Peoples Jute Mill colony on Monday night while his accomplices were holding a secret meeting with him to plan for bomb attacks, said OC Shahidul Islam of Khalishpur Police Station.

Rab recovered a pipe gun, four bullets and two empty shells from the place of encounter.

According to Rab, Ripon, son of Kanchan Ali Sarder of Bakerganj upazila of Barisal district, was wanted for five murders and three bomb attack cases recorded with the Khulna and Sonadanga police stations.

HOTELIER MURDER Ownership feud might be the reason

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police ruled out involvement of extortionists and suspect ownership feuds to be the prime reason behind the murder of hotelier

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India tightens border security after Mumbai blasts

REUTERS, Kolkata

India is stepping up vigil on its borders with Nepal and Bangladesh after investigations into the Mumbai bombings revealed militants and weapons were being smuggled from these areas, officials said on Tuesday.

While the number of border guards on the open frontier with Nepal would be doubled to nearly 11,000, troops would speed up building a fence on the Bangladesh border and use high-technology equipment to monitor the area, they said.

"It is an open border with Nepal and anybody can enter anytime and we are viewing this seriously," Raj Kanojia, an inspector-general of police, told Reuters.

"With penetration impossible from the northern side due to strong presence of army and police, the militants are using the eastern side to infiltrate," he added.

Investigations into the train bombings in Mumbai this month, which killed more than 180 people, revealed that Islamist militants were increasingly smuggling arms and explosives and infiltrating through the two borders, officials said.

Two of the four men arrested so far in connection with the blasts were from the eastern state of Bihar, which along with West Bengal and Sikkim states, shares borders with Nepal and has been identified as vulnerable, they said.

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PHOTO: STAR

A mobile court yesterday confiscated a large quantity of rotten chicken among other items at Chalet Restaurant on Sonargaon Road in the capital.

Nepali Maoists won't surrender arms before likely polls

REUTERS, Kathmandu

Nepal's Maoist rebels will not give up their arms before a likely vote next year to decide the political future of the restive Himalayan nation, rebel chief Prachanda has told United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan.

Nepal's interim government wrote to the UN in early July asking for help in decommissioning rebel arms ahead of the elections to a constituent assembly to write a new constitution for the country.

But the Maoists say they will only go as far as keeping their fighters in camps -- and that depends on government forces remaining inside their barracks. It is unclear how security for the polls would be enforced.

Prachanda, in a letter sent to Annan on Monday, said handing over weapons was unacceptable. "... any talk of decommissioning of arms of only the PLA (People's Liberation Army of the Maoists) before the election to the constituent assembly is just unthinkable," Prachanda said.

The new constitution is expected to spell out the future of the monarchy. "Such arbitrary and unilateral

application of two different yardsticks to the two armies is highly objectionable and totally unacceptable to us," Prachanda said in the letter seen by Reuters.

The guerrillas say the army is still loyal to King Gyanendra who gave in to weeks of pro-democracy protests in April and handed over power to the political parties.

A UN team is due to arrive in Kathmandu this week to look for ways to support the peace process.

The army has about 90,000 members, and the Maoists want the two forces to be merged after the elections.

Separately on Monday, Nepal's interim government scrapped a special military secretariat, which provided security to the king, further scaling down his powers.

The body managed more than 2,000 soldiers responsible for the king's security and were permanently stationed inside the palace.

"The king's security will now be looked after by the government and not be controlled by the royal palace," Works and Physical Planning Minister Gopal Man Shrestha said after a cabinet meeting.

Prayer Timing

July 26

	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-20	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	5-00	5-15
Maghrib	6-50	6-55
Esha	8-15	8-45

Source: Islamic Foundation