

## Macron urges new Mideast talks after call with Abbas

AFP, Paris

French President Emmanuel Macron urged fresh Middle East peace talks after Israel and the UAE agreed to normalise ties in a move praised by many Western governments, including Paris, but unanimously denounced by the Palestinians.

Taking to Twitter after a phone conversation with Mahmoud Abbas, Macron said he told the Palestinian leader he was determined "to work for

peace in the Middle East".

He added: "The resumption of talks to reach a fair solution that respects international law remains a priority."

The French leader had hailed the agreement announced by US President Donald Trump on Thursday as a "courageous decision" by the UAE, saying it showed Dubai's "desire to contribute to the establishment of a just and lasting peace between Israel and the Palestinians".

## Cops out to use them as pawns

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Md Mobarak, brother of Md Aiyas, the third witness in the police case, showed these correspondents the broken lock on the front door of their house, and their broken back door.

"This was in the early hours of August 12. Aiyas had been picked up around 3:30pm the day before. A plainclothes man, flanked by two policemen in uniform, came at 2:00am. They asked for Aiyas's wife, so she came to speak and answered questions about Aiyas.

"They left and came back an hour later -- this time we were fearful and we didn't open the door. They broke the locks, barged in and said Aiyas's wife needed to go to Teknaf Police Station with them," claimed Mobarak.

"We pleaded and they finally relented -- but not before getting their signatures on a sheaf of blank papers," he mentioned.

Aiyas' family also alleged that the circumstances surrounding how Aiyas had been picked up was also very unnerving.

Mobarak said, "Around 3:30pm [on August 11], a group of people identifying themselves as journalists came to our house. They asked Aiyas to show them the spot where Sinha was coming down from the hill. I also went to the spot with my brother and saw Nazimuddin and Nurul Amin there.

"The people who identified themselves as journalists then said they must go to Cox's Bazar to meet a foreign journalist. I was left behind. Later, his [Aiyas] phone was found turned off. Around 10:00pm, he called to say he was well and asked me not to worry. The following day, Rab produced him before court as an arrestee," he mentioned.

On the August 11 night, policemen knocked the doors of their neighbours in the middle of the night. Right opposite Aiyas's home is a mud-walled house where his distant uncle lives.

"They came to our house around 11:45pm and banged on the front door. They couldn't break it because we use old-fashioned iron-rings to lock the door," said the relative.

The house next door, where a single mother lives with her young child, was not spared either. Another neighbour named Md Hashim said police came to his house around 8:30pm and they too kept the door closed out of fear.

Hamid Hossain, an auto-rickshaw driver listed as a witness in the police case, had left the area, claimed his brother Kamal.

"I don't know why police made my brother a witness... On the July 31 night, he had received a phone call from Aiyas saying they needed an auto-rickshaw to go to Shamlapur where a robber had been caught by police. He dropped them off in Shamlapur and came back."

The following day was the Eid day. Police came around 10:00am while my brother was slaughtering a sacrificial cow. They took him to the police station in that state. He told me that they made him sign some blank papers," alleged

## Indian foreign secy

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Delhi's special message to Dhaka, according to the source.

He will leave Dhaka for home the same day, wrapping up his brief visit.

However, there was no official announcement on the visit.

India recently described its relations with Bangladesh as "exceptionally close" but expressed displeasure over a "mischievous" story pertaining to Bangladesh-India ties.

"We're confident that both sides appreciate mutual sensitivity and mutual respect building further on the relationship," said Anurag Srivastava, spokesperson of the Indian external

## ACC grills him over loan

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investigation, we cannot disclose it right now," said Meraz.

According to the case statement, Shahed bribed former audit committee chairman of the then Farmers Bank Mahbubul Haque Chisty -- accused in five cases filed last year for illegally amassing Tk 135.45 crore -- and gave him Tk 35 lakh to get the loan.

Shahed opened a current account with Gulshan Corporate Branch of Farmers Bank on January 11, 2015.

On the same day, he applied for a Tk 2 crore loan to buy an MRI machine worth around Tk 3.4 crore for his hospital.

In his application, Shahed pledged to keep Tk 1 crore FDR as mortgage against the loan.

On January 15, 2015 at the 1st meeting of the committee, chaired by Chisty, the memo was produced and approved.

After three days, the Credit Risk

Kamal.

Hamid has been hiding since then, he claimed.

Police also broke into the house of another witness, Nazimuddin, claimed locals.

There have been allegations that Nazimuddin's wife was forced to file a case claiming that her husband had been abducted by several men in a Hiace microbus. She was allegedly made to give her thumbprint on the documents.

When these correspondents visited her home yesterday, the entire premises were found empty. The neighbours said she fled the village the very next morning.

While Rab Director General Chowdhury Abdullah Al Mamun was visiting Baharchhara yesterday, journalists asked him why police forced the wife of one of the witnesses to file an abduction case when in fact it was Rab that had arrested the witnesses.

In response, he said the agencies are working together. "There is no lack of coordination among them."

Khairul Islam, the investigation officer of the Sinha murder case and also assistant superintendent of police from Rab, described to the Rab DG how Sinha had come out of the car with his hands raised in the air when he was shot.

INVESTIGATION

At a press briefing in Cox's Bazar last night, Lt Col Ashiq Billah, director of Rab's Legal and Media Wing, said, "An officer with a track record of solving 700 cases has been given the charge of investigation. Today we interrogated three members of the Armed Police Battalion, who were present at the check post on the day of the incident."

They are sub-inspector Md Shahjahan and constables Md Razib and Md Abdullah.

"They will be interrogated further for the next few days. Legal action will be taken if their involvement is found.

"We will also investigate the narcotics case that police filed against Shipra Debnath, one of Maj (ret'd) Sinha's team members. We have prayed to the court for a directive on handover of Shipra's belongings to Rab. Her belongings are currently with police but they have not yet cooperated," he said.

"We also quizzed the four arrested policemen and three witnesses, and got vital information that we are currently analysing," added the Rab official.

Sources at the Cox's Bazar district jail said the four-member probe committee, formed by the home ministry, interrogated inspector Liaqat Ali, the prime accused in the Sinha murder case, and another accused, SI Nandadulal Rakhshit, from 10:30am to 6:45pm yesterday.

Another key accused, Pradeep Kumar, former OC of Teknaf Police Station, will be quizzed today, added the sources.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Police Association issued a statement claiming that some vested quarters are out to malign the image of police while they are in fact completely cooperating in the investigation.

affairs ministry at a virtual weekly media briefing in New Delhi.

Bangladesh Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen recently termed Bangladesh-India relations "blood ties" and Bangladesh-China relations "economic ties".

On August 14, Bangladesh's Deputy High Commission in Kolkata condemned the disinformation campaign targeting Bangladesh by several web portals based in India's northeastern region.

The mission also urged all concerned to disregard the false information peddled.



Children hangout on a large sewage pipe left in their neighbourhood at Mugda in the capital. With schools closed and not much else to be done during the day, many spend the time playing with neighbourhood children. Some forget to wear the masks though. The photo was taken a couple of days ago.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## I will sue everyone, I swear

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Bazar on July 3 to take part in a documentary being made by the former major.

Sinha was killed in police firing on July 31 at Shamlapur police check-post, triggering an outcry in the country.

Shipra was arrested on charge of possessing liquor and marijuana, and was released from jail on bail amid widespread protests.

Since her release, she has been exposed to cyberbullying. Two superintendents of police posted Shipra's personal photos on their social media accounts, taking a dig at her character. A Supreme Court lawyer on Sunday filed a writ petition with the High Court challenging the two police officers' actions.

"I want justice for the murder of Maj (ret'd) Sinha. I want justice for the character assassination of me and my colleague. I want law enforcement agencies to adopt positive lens," Shipra said in the 8:56-minute video.

The attempt to assassinate her character was an insult and humiliation to every working woman in the country, she noted, adding that it was done intentionally to divert attention from the killing.

"Isn't it [the attempt at character assassination] a punishable offence under the law of Bangladesh?" she asked.

"I am a student and I also work, besides studying. In an independent country, doesn't any woman have the

right to live like according to her will while not harming others?" she asked.

Shipra said that she is not blaming the entire police force as there are many honest officers.

"But if the officers accused in killing and the officers with perverted minds engaged in defaming a woman are not identified and brought to book, the nation will hold the entire police force responsible," she said.

Describing the fateful night of July 31 and its aftermath, Shipra said about 10-12 police members entered their resort after 12:00am without any search warrant or any female police.

Without permission, they searched their rooms but did not give any information about the whereabouts of Sinha and Sefat even after repeated questions, she said.

Around 2:30am, some plainclothes men appeared at the scene and Shipra repeated the question.

"Without giving any reason, they took me and my other colleague Tahsin Rifat Noor to Ramu Police Station. Then in the afternoon, they took us to the office of Cox's Bazar SP..."

In this whole period, I requested every police officer to allow me to see Maj (ret'd) Sinha for the last time... but my request fell upon deaf ears.

"Around 8:00pm, they escorted me in a police van. Then I was sent to jail. There, I came to know I am accused in a narcotics case," Shipra said.

## Expatriate killed 'for money'

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Taking the case into cognisance, the court ordered the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to investigate the incident and submit a report to it.

Jafar's father Abdul Aziz told The Daily Star, "My son had been living in Oman for the last nine years. He used to come home in Patiya's Kachuai union every year to spend some time with us. He was about to leave but couldn't as international flights remain suspended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

"I myself worked in Oman for 18 years but could not change the fate of my family. My son was different, he drew a handsome salary. With money sent by him, we bought our house and many other properties."

Aziz said two men in police uniform along with several others in plainclothes appeared at their home around 6:00am on July 29 -- two days before the alleged shootout. As Jafar opened the door, they introduced themselves as members of Patiya police station, said the father.

"They put my son in handcuffs. At one point, they ransacked his room and took away valuables from his almira. Aziz said, adding that the policemen then pick Jafar up in their van and headed towards Cox's Bazar.

Aziz alleged police later called them multiple times over the phone and demanded Tk 50 lakh for his son's release. They also threatened to kill him in "crossfire" if they failed to pay the money.

"On July 31, local union parishad member Anwar Hossain called us over phone and said Jafar was killed in a

gunfight with police in Cox's Bazar. His body was kept at the morgue of Cox's Bazar Medical College," he said.

Contacted, Anwar Hossain, member of Ward-4 under Number 16 Kachuai union, said, "I was informed about the shootout by Patiya police. They said Jafar's family members could take the body from the morgue."

He also said Jafar had married only one and a half years ago and that he was very polite. "As far as I know, he had no criminal records with any police station."

**VICTIM OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY?**

Hasan, another victim of the July 31 "crossfire", was also allegedly picked up from his locality. According to local sources, he was a poor rickshaw puller, who used to live in Paikpara area, which falls in Ward-6 of Patiya municipality.

Safuul Alam, councillor of the ward, said, "Hasan was toiling day and night to run his family. As far as I know, he had no criminal record."

"I was informed by Patiya police that Hasan was killed in a shootout with police. Later, I informed his family about it," he said.

The councillor, however, said there is another Hasan in the municipality area who is known to be a yaba trader. "It might have been a case of mistaken identity."

Asked whether Jafar or Hasan had any criminal records with Patiya police station, OC Borhan Uddin of the police station yesterday said, "I can't make any comment without checking the documents. I will tell you later."

**THE 'GUNFIGHT'**

After the "gunfight", Chakaria police

claimed that they had arrested two people with yaba pills around 1:00am on July 31. During interrogation, the arrestees said yaba dealers were distributing the tablets in Boitali area.

Based on the information, Inspector Aminul Islam said police raided the area around 2:30am. But sensing their presence, the criminals opened fire on them, forcing the law enforcers to retaliate, which retriggered a "gunfight".

Aminul said they found bullet-hit bodies of Jafar, Hasan and Jahir lying at the spot after the "gun-battle" and that the three were members of a yaba smuggling gang. He said Jahir stood accused in three narcotics cases.

Police also claimed to have recovered 44,000 yaba tablets, two firearms, and seven cartridges from the spot.

Four police personnel -- Officer-in-Charge of Chakaria police station Habibur Rahman, Aminul, and constables Sajjad and Sabuj -- were also injured, claimed the inspector.

Later, Aminul filed a First Information Report with the police station over the incident and accused the three of assaulting police and obstructing them from discharging their duties, as well as murder.

This correspondent tried to contact Aminul and Habibur repeatedly for comment on the matter, but they did not answer.

In the meantime, Jafar's father's fight for justice continues. He vowed to bring down those who killed his loving son.

"My son was innocent. He had enmity with no one. They killed him for money. I want justice," he sobbed.

## 'Yaba smugglers' fire at BGB men in Bandarban

Pills worth Tk 4.2cr recovered

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Suspected yaba smugglers fired at members of Border Guard Bangladesh near the Bangladesh-Myanmar border in Bandarban's Naikhyangchhari upazila on Sunday night, BGB said in a press release.

The suspected smugglers were seen coming from Myanmar and shot at BGB members patrolling the area, and fled the scene after the BGB men fired back in self-defence, said the press release.

BGB members later raided Chumdhum's Rejuamtoli area near the border and recovered 1,40,000 yaba tablets worth around Tk 4.2 crore, said Lt Col Ali Haider Azad Ahmed, commanding officer of BGB-34 battalion.

No one was arrested in this connection.

## BFIU orders

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Together, the 83 people misappropriated the Tk 3,000 crore, added the sources.

In its investigation, the BFIU found that two businessmen and their family members received Tk 34 crore in their bank accounts.

Besides, about Tk 60 crore was transferred into the bank account of Purnima Rani Halder, wife of IFLSL and HAL International Director Swapan Kumar Mistri, revealed the probe.

On January 8, the ACC had filed a case against Proshanta over amassing about Tk 274.91 crore beyond his known source of income.

The enquiry of the case found that questionable transactions of about Tk 1,636 crore were made in Proshanta's accounts and also in those of people related to his personal interest over a certain period of time.

The graft watchdog revealed that Proshanta made transactions of about Tk 240.87 crore in his accounts, Tk 160 crore in his mother's account and Tk 1,235.7 crore in those of people related to his personal interest.

ACC Deputy Director Gulshan Anwar Prodhan is now probing the suspicious transactions of Tk 3,000 crore.

Meanwhile, the ACC was asked HAL International directors Swapan Kumar Mistri, Kazi Momrez Mahmud, Pritish Kumar Halder, Amitav Adhikari and Managing Director Susmita Saha to appear before it today for quizzing. They are among the 83 people whose bank accounts would be frozen.

A large amount of money was transferred into their accounts, said sources.

Tomorrow, the graft watchdog will quiz RB Enterprise proprietor Ratan Kumar Biswas, Anan Chemical directors Uzzal Kumar Nandi and Anita Kaur and Reptiles Farm Chairman Shimu Roy in this regard. The four are also among the 83.

Proshanta is now living in Canada. He, along with brother Pritish Kumar Halder and wife Susmita Saha, is the director of a Canadian firm -- P&L Hal Holding Inc -- since July 3, 2014, according to official records in the North American country.

## SC keeps

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disposals, he said, adding that Khaleda is on bail in these cases.

He added that Khaleda is accused in a total of 37 cases and she is on bail in 35 of them and has been convicted in two (Zia Orphanage and Zia Charitable) cases.

The BNP chairperson was released from jail following an executive order issued by the government on March 25 this year.

Following four separate petitions filed by Khaleda, the HC on April 13, 2017 stayed the trial proceedings against her in four separate vandalism and arson cases and also issued four rules asking the government to explain as to why the proceedings of the cases should not be scrapped.

The cases were filed during an anti-government agitation enforced by a BNP-led alliance in 2015.

Meanwhile, Dhaka Metropolitan Session's Judge Imrul Qayes set October 6 for Khaleda's appearance before it in 11 cases lodged against her.

He set the date allowing a time plea from the defence, court assistant clerk Anisur Rahman told BSS.

Of the cases, eight were filed with Darus Salam Police Station for carrying out subversive activities, and two others were filed with Jatrabari Police Station.

Police filed 10 cases while one, for sedition, was filed by a civilian.

The hearing on the charge framing in 10 cases was scheduled to be held yesterday, while the court was also to accept the charge sheet in the sedition case.

## Khaleda may not be back

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even meet her party leaders since her release from jail, except for exchanging Eid greetings with some senior leaders at her Gulshan residence in the capital on August 1.

Several leaders said Khaleda's absence in politics impacted negatively on the mental strength of the party men and that's why she should be active in party affairs. They said the chairperson herself wants to be active in politics.

Party sources say Khaleda's health is not good as she has been suffering from diabetes, arthritis, and some other health complications for years.

Speaking to The Daily Star last week, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam Alamgir said, "Leaders and activists want Khaleda Zia to be active in politics. But her health does not permit her."

He said neither the party nor the chairperson has made any decision in this regard.

Sources said Khaleda recently expressed her willingness to go to her Gulshan office once the Covid-19 situation is over.

While exchanging Eid greetings, the opposition leader discussed party affairs

with several BNP standing committee members. The leaders said Khaleda herself should make all the party decisions as she is now out of jail.

Although no one within the party differed publicly with BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman on different issues, many leaders say they are more comfortable with working under Khaleda's leadership. Tarique is now staying in the UK.

"Khaleda Zia had been in the dark regarding most of the party activities for more than two years when she was behind bars. She can give us directives now even if she cannot actively take part in politics," a senior BNP leader said wishing not to be named.

BNP vice-chairman Mohammad Shahjahan said, "Khaleda Zia is an icon of unity and a symbol of the nationalist force. There is no alternative to her leadership. She has dedicated her whole life to politics. She is not active in politics now due to her illness, but she will surely take part in politics after recovery."

Khaleda walked out of jail at a time when the world has been hit by Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the

prevailing epidemic situation, she did not even visit any hospital for treatment. However, doctors visited her at home regularly and gave treatment.

Ruhul Quddus Talukder Dulu, organising secretary of BNP, said the party chairperson's good health is their first priority. "Khaleda Zia is the symbol of our strength. We hope she will recover soon and will join active politics."

The government through an executive order freed the BNP chief from jail on March 25 for six months on conditions that she would stay at her home and not leave the country.

Khaleda landed in jail on February 8, 2017 after being sentenced to five years' imprisonment by a special court in Dhaka in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case.

On October 30 the following year, the High Court enhanced her punishment to 10 years after dismissing her appeal in the case.

The former premier was convicted by another special court in Dhaka in the Zia Charitable Trust corruption case on October 29, 2018. She was sentenced to seven years' rigorous imprisonment by the court.