

Dhaka, Thimpu may agree on a second transit route

By M Anwarul Haq

Bangladesh and Bhutan are expected to sign a new ten-year co-operation agreement soon. Although similar in content to the existing one that expires on September 7, the new treaty will be more comprehensive in nature.

Two land transit routes, scope for increase in trade and promotion of tourism between the two countries both by air and land are likely to feature in the new agreement.

A high-level delegation from Thimpu is expected to arrive in the capital on August 19 to negotiate with officials here and do the groundwork for the new Bangladesh-Bhutan trade and co-operation trade. On completion of the talks, the signing is expected some time next month.

The new agreement which is expected to be signed following the negotiations would further renew, broaden and strengthen the existing commercial and trading arrangements between the two neighbours, said Lhatu Wangchuk, Bhutan's ambassador to Bangladesh. "Bangladesh and Bhutan are two closest neighbours and we have no contentious issues between us."

Bangladesh and Bhutan signed the present commercial treaty 20 years back in 1980. The treaty had an initial life of ten years with the provision of

renewal for ten more years.

While in Dhaka on a recent official trip, Foreign Minister of Bhutan Lyonpo Jigme Thinley had expressed optimism that the new agreement would increase trade and people-to-people interaction "to a great extent."

The landlocked kingdom is also expecting opening of a second overland transit route through India to Bangladesh "for easier and more economic movement" of its cargo.

The Bhutanese foreign minister also revealed that India had been approached and it had agreed to allow a second land transit route.

The proposed route would connect Nakugaon in Sherpur on the Bangladesh side and Dalu on the Indian side of Bhutan.

The present transit route through the landport at Burmian in Lalmonirhat lacks necessary infrastructure. There is no warehousing facility, power supply or telecommunication arrangements. Besides, the Nakugaon route would be shorter and enable access to the eastern part of Bhutan where the majority of the Bhutanese people live.

There is another aspect, observers believe, that authorities of both countries should consider.

Announcement



The cover story of this week's *Star* Weekend Magazine focuses on how IT institutes in Dhaka are preparing their students for the job market.

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Flood feared in more areas Major rivers keep swelling

By Staff Correspondent

Fresh low-lying areas of Dhaka, Narayanganj and Manikganj might get swamped by today as some major rivers are still flowing above the danger level.

According to Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre (FFWC), flood situation is likely to deteriorate in Chapainawabganj and areas between Gopabandha and Bhagyalakul due to rise in water level of the river Padma.

Padma was flowing 63 cm and 76 cm above the danger level at Gopabandha and Bhagyalakul respectively. The river Mahananda in Chapainawabganj was flowing 1 cm above the danger level.

Out of 46 water level stations monitored by FFWC, 22 recorded rise while 21 recorded fall. Water was flowing above the danger level at 10 stations.

Jamuna was flowing 22 cm, 21 cm and 60 cm above the danger level at Bahadurabad, Sirajganj and Aricha points respectively.

The Shitalakhya at Narayanganj was flowing 22 cm above the danger mark. The Kaliganga at Taraghat recorded a further 35 cm rise and was flowing 2 cm above the danger level.

Manu in the Meghna basin was flowing 73 cm above the danger level at Manu Railway Bridge. According to FFWC, the flood water of Assam has been flowing into the Bay of Bengal through the Meghna Basin.



Indigenous people organised a colourful programme at the Central Shaheed Minar in the city, marking the International Indigenous Day yesterday. — Star photo

Efforts to revive SAARC summit in full swing

After New Delhi, Islamabad is foreign secy's next stop

By Diplomatic Correspondent

Foreign Secretary Shafi Sami yesterday said that Dhaka was making efforts to create a congenial climate for regional co-operation and to revive the SAARC process.

"There is a feeling that regional co-operation has suffered. At the behest of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, I travelled to Delhi to convey the feeling that enhanced socio-economic co-operation among neighbours would ensure greater peace and development in the region. I will also visit Islamabad (August 22 and 23) conveying almost the same feeling," Sami said at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was briefing newsmen on the outcome of his recent Delhi trip on August 7 and 8.

He said that on his trip to the Indian as a special envoy of the Bangladesh Prime Minister, he had handed over a personal letter to the Indian premier. He termed the trip as "productive and useful for regional co-operation and the revival of the SAARC process."

Sami declined to give any details about the content of the letter but said that it "pertains to the need for regional co-operation with a view to engaging the attention of all countries to the importance of peace for economic development."

A number of bilateral issues were discussed with the Indian prime minister, he said, adding that he had conveyed to Atal Behari Vajpayee the feeling that Bangladesh considered India "as a natural friend."

On Vajpayee's response upon

receiving Sheikh Hasina's letter, the foreign secretary only said, "We are encouraged by the views of the Indian Prime Minister."

Sami said he would leave for Islamabad on a similar mission on August 22 and may carry a letter from the PM for Pakistan's chief executive. However, he volunteered no further details.

"I cannot comment on the exact nature of my proposed Islamabad trip," Sami said. "Nor can I say whether Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's message to Pakistan Chief Executive (General Pervez Musharraf) will be similar to the one sent to the Indian Premier."

Indo-Bangla relations The foreign secretary described the present Indo-Bangla relation "as very good" and said, "We have made significant progress in the recent past."

He cited recent linking of the Petrapole-Benapole rail route, the possibility of rail-link between Akhaura and Agartala and setting up of a joint task force to study matters of transit and transshipment as advancement in bilateral relations.

Shafi Sami said that he had the opportunity to have bilateral talks with Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh and Foreign Secretary Lalit Man Singh. He also met West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu, now in Delhi for treatment. Besides, he exchanged views with former Indian Prime Minister I K Gujral and former foreign minister Pranab Mukherjee.

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83 voters at Khaleda's residence?

By Staff Correspondent

As many as 83 voters — 60 males and 23 females — were registered at the cantonment residence of Khaleda Zia, the chairperson of BNP and Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, according to the draft voter list.

The draft list, published on July 18, mentioned Khaleda's house at 6, Shaheed Mohtamul Road in the Dhaka Cantonment as the common address of all those voters.

The voters include Khaleda herself, her two sons — Tareque Rahman and Arafat Rahman — and their wives. Also included in the list are Shamsul Alam, a civil servant who was at the Prime Minister's Office during the tenure of Khaleda government, and his wife Khadija Alam.

Only Khaleda Zia has been listed as a politician while her two sons as businessmen and Tareque's wife, Jubaida Rahman, as physician. There is only one student named Majid Ahmed.

Of the remaining voters, 62 have been identified as employed, five of them as public servant, and 16 as housewives. Ruling Awami League has challenged the list of voters at the opposition leader's house, saying there are at least 21 fictitious names, while another 28 do not live in that house now.

In a letter to the Chief Election Commissioner yesterday, the ruling party also demanded an investigation into the matter.

Signed by AL's Office Secretary Abdul Mannan Khan, the letter bitterly criticised BNP Secretary-General Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan, who had recently alleged that there are fake voters in the draft list. "Had there been any inclusion of fake voters in the list, we believe it was done by Mannan Bhuiyan and the workers of his party," the letter said.

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US co to invest \$1b in jute-based composite plants

State minister tells The Daily Star

By Mustak Hossain

A US company has proposed to invest one billion US dollars in the country's jute sector, according to the state minister for jute.

Proterra Capital has agreed to set up jute-based composite plants in Bangladesh at an approximate cost of one billion dollars, said State Minister for Jute A K Faezul Huq in an interview with The Daily Star.

This would help revitalise the country's dying jute sector, he said. "The company has chosen Bangladesh to set up its plants for availability of best quality jute and cheap manpower."

India and China, the two other major jute growing countries, tried to strike a similar deal with Proterra, but the company opted for Bangladesh, Huq said.

"Mick Hodges, Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Proterra Capital, proposed to me to set up the plant during my recent visit in the United States," the state minister said.

Although the government would not have to invest in the plants, it would be required to provide ready infrastructure for the proposed plants in the form of transferring at least two running jute mills, the state minister said. He said the government is yet to decide on equity sharing.

The plants will produce compressed jute block used as a construction material to keep houses and business establishments warm in Europe and America, he said. The produce

would be exported to Europe and North American markets since there is no domestic demand for such product, he said.

"The government will provide all necessary help and support for successful implementation of the plants as the main objective of the present government is to encourage foreign investment."

A team from US will visit Bangladesh to conduct a feasibility study on the proposed plants, the minister said, but gave no specific date.

The plants would process up to 100,000 tonnes of raw jute annually, he said. Bangladesh produces about 850,000 tonnes of raw jute every year. The new plants would raise the aggregate employment in the country's jute sector from the existing 85,000 to 110,000.

He said the proposed plants would help the country regain its lost glory in the jute market. Jute and jute goods account for about 15 per cent of the GDP.

The Dhaka-based International Jute Organisation (IJO) ceased its operation in April after jute producing and consuming countries agreed on a new international pact regulating trade in the material.

Despite Dhaka's efforts to pursue European Union countries to continue their support in jute and jute products, they withdrew their support from the global forum.

"There will be cooperation among jute growing and consuming countries in other forms," said the state minister.

43m DM German aid for three projects

By Rafiq Hasan

An agreement will be signed here today under which Germany will provide 43 million Deutsche Mark for three projects, according to finance ministry sources.

The projects are rehabilitation of Ashuganj power plant (25 m), dredging of Chittagong port (15 m) and pre-paid metering system in power supply (3m).

Assistance for Ashuganj power plant is conditioned to privatisation of the plant, as suggested by Germany and other

donors. The government has decided to form Ashuganj Power Company to privatise the plant. A proposal in this regard has been submitted to the law ministry and a decision is likely soon. But if there is no decision, the government will have the right to divert the money to other projects, the sources said.

The amounts for dredging the port and introducing pre-paid metering system will be available soon. Part of the as-

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BGMEA sees boon in new GSP provision

By Staff Correspondent

BGMEA leaders yesterday claimed that the new provision of GSP facility for garments made with fabrics from SAARC countries would not affect local textile industries.

Rather, it will expand Bangladesh's garments market abroad and create more demand for fabrics in the country.

As per a recent agreement signed between the government and the European Union, apparels made with raw materials from any SAARC country will get GSP facilities in EU countries. Earlier, apparels made only with local fabrics were eligible for GSP.

The BGMEA leaders said, if forward linkage industries expand in the country, demand for backward linkage industries will also rise. The 'SAARC cumulation' will not harm the local textile sector, they said while exchanging views with a group of newsmen at the BGMEA office.

They congratulated the government for this.

Refuting the allegation that it would bring disaster for the country's textile sector, they said that it would rather help setting up of backward linkage industries and create employment.

They said that the local textile mills could meet only 10 per cent of the demand for 'woven fabrics' and that their prices were higher than those of imported ones despite huge incentives by the government.

First Vice-president Alhaj Khalid Rahman, Second Vice-president Anisul Huq and Vice-president (Finance) Benazir Ahmed of BGMEA and its Directors Abu Taher and Mahmudur Rahman Manna were present.

"We have to prepare for the situation when there will be no quota facility after 2004. The new provision will help us establish backward and forward linkage industries," said Anisul Huq.

He said Tk 60,000 crore investments are needed to meet garment factories' demand for fabrics, but we do not see any such possibility before 2004. "So what's wrong in using

imported fabrics and getting GSP facilities?"

Some categories of 'woven fabrics' are not produced in the country. "If we get GSP facility by importing those, our ready made garments sector will be benefited."

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3 more dengue patients die

By Staff Correspondent

Three more persons died of dengue haemorrhagic fever (DHF) on Tuesday, two of them in the city.

Two and a half years old Rabi died of the dreaded disease at Dhaka Shishu Hospital about six hours after admission.

Sumon, 17, died at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH), sources in the hospital said.

Ripon, 28, died while being brought to Dhaka from Gopalganj Sadar Hospital.

Sixty-eight more dengue patients were admitted to different hospitals and clinics in the city yesterday.

Of them, 14 were admitted to DMCH, six to Mitford Hospital, three to Dhaka Shishu Hospital, four to BIRDEM and one to Suhrawardi Hospital.

The Red Crescent Holy Family Hospital and Bangladesh Medical College Hospital admitted.

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2 crew of foreign ship shot at Ctg Port

CHITTAGONG, Aug 9: Two crew were shot at pirates fired on them in an abortive bid to loot a foreign ship at outer anchorage on Tuesday night, reports UNB.

The injured Runahar and Jain are both Indonesian nationals employed in the Panamanian ship MV Ametyst. Police said the pirates opened fire on the ship while they were retreating in the face of resistance by the crew at about 1 am.

The ship anchored on August 6 with 615 tons of plywood. The injured were rushed to Bandar Hospital.

A case was filed with Bandar police.

Editors' Guild formed

An 'Editors' Guild' was formed at a meeting at the National Press Club yesterday with the objective of upholding freedom of the press, professional ethics, rights and dignity, reports BSS.

The Guild will also work to strengthen the editorial institution.

ABM Musa and KG Mustafa, former Editors, Toab Khan, Advisory Editor of the Daily Janakanta, Mahbubul Alam, Editor of The Independent, Enayeturrahman Khan, Editor-in-Chief of the weekly Holiday, Rahat Khan, Acting Editor of the Ittefaq, Bazlur Rahman, Editor of the daily Sangbad, AM Mozammel, Editor of the New Nation, Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, Editor of the Bangladesh Observer, Reazuddin Ahmed, Chief Editor of the Financial Express, Editor of the Financial Express, Editor of the Financial Express, Haroon Habib, Chief Editor of BSS, Motiur Rahman, Editor of the Prothom Alo, Motiur Rahman Chowdhury, Chief Editor of the Manobjanin, Benazir Ahmed, Acting Editor of the Bhorer Kagoj, Zahiduzzaman Faruq, Editor of the Arthaniti and Abul Asad, Editor of the daily Sangram were present at the meeting.

TK 16cr bailout plan for KNM

The government will funnel Tk 16 crore as working capital into state-run Khulna Newsprint Mill in view of huge demand for newsprint, especially for print media, reports UNB.

A high-level meeting reviewing the performance of SOEs under the Industries Ministry was today apprised of the bailout plan for the mill.

Industries Minister Tofail Ahmed, who chaired the meeting, also asked the BCIC to make a leak-proof plan for KNM to make it a viable concern.

He also enquired about the production status of North Bengal Paper Mills, Karnaphuli Paper Mills and Sylhet Pulp and Paper Mills and asked the authorities to ensure optimum productivity.

The meeting was informed that increased price and short supply of gaoah wood — basic raw material of newsprint — and abrupt stoppage of subsidy since 1992-93 raised production cost of KNM and reduced its capacity by at least 50 per cent.

Sundarbans forest authority is supposed to supply 48 lakh cft gaoah per annum for production 48,000 tonnes of newsprint at KNM.

BCIC authorities also informed the meeting that due to sale price policy in 1992-93, the KNM had to incur huge loss that spiralled to Tk 302 crore at present.

Newsprint of KNM was sold at Tk 19,000 per tonne against the market price as high as Tk 50,000 per tonnes.

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Remembrance of a holocaust SANGAT or South Asian Network for Gender Activists and Trainers held a candle lighting programme at the Central Shaheed Minar in remembrance of the victims of Hiroshima bombing. — Star photo

ADMISSION INTO MBA, BBA, COMPUTER SCIENCE & ENGINEERING

IUC (Dhaka-9 August): The Dhaka Campus of Islamic University Chittagong (IUC) will start the next batch of Executive MBA, BBA and Computer Science & Engineering Programs in September.

For the one year & eight months (5 semesters) MBA Program, candidates having a master degree or graduates with at least two years experience at executive level are eligible to apply. The total cost of this Program is Tk. 90,000. Classes of MBA will be held three days a week Saturdays and Thursdays from 6.30 to 9.30 p.m. and Fridays.

For the four-year BBA Program candidates having at least second division at SSC/Dakhil and HSC/Alim or equivalents may apply. The total cost of this course is Tk. 1,80,400.

Candidates having at least second division in SSC/Dakhil and HSC/Alim from science group or equivalents may apply for the four-year computer science & Engineering course. The total cost of this course is Tk. 2,72,400.

Students who hold places between 1st to 10th in the merit list at the HSC/Alim or equivalent are free from tuition fees. Besides, there is a provision for financial assistance for meritorious students.

The last date for application is 23

August. Viva voce for MBA will take place on Friday, 25 August. Admission test for BBA and Computer science & Engineering will be held on Saturday, 26 August. For details please contact IUC Dhaka Campus, House # 23, Road # 3, Dhanmondi, Dhaka. Phone : 8624692, 017-814838 (Gp-Gp). The Office is open every day from 9 am to 5 p.m. Including the Fridays.

Admission into B.A. (Hons) in English is on at IUC main campus in Chittagong. Besides, some seats are still available for BBA female section. Detail information can be obtained from IUC 154/A College Road, Chittagong, Phone : 610085, 610308, 638657.

IUC started its activities in 1995 in Chittagong after getting approval from Bangladesh Government as a private university.

It has modern furniture, a rich library, computer labs, air-conditioned classrooms etc. which has given these campuses an international outlook.

IUC follows international standard curriculum in these programs and there are opportunities to transfer credits to some foreign universities including University college of Cape Briton (UCCB) Canada, International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM), Multi-media University (UMM), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), and Leicester University UK.