

Dhaka & Delhi offer to train Afghan officers

PTI, London

India and Bangladesh have offered to train Afghan officers and Indian defence technicians will service the Afghan Air Force's fleet of MIG 21 'Fishbed' interceptor or ground attack aircraft fighters, a leading defence weekly has reported.

"The Afghan Air Force and Army will work together (with India) to find new avenues of co-operation," Afghan Defence Minister Gen Mohammad Qaseem Fahim was quoted by the Jane's defence weekly as saying.

According to Fahim, Afghanistan will receive clothing for the Army and the Air Force, as well as an evaluation of infrastructural support.

Indian defence technicians will also service the Afghan Air Force fleet of MIG-21 'Fishbed' interceptors, the report said.

Wacky weather

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The met office official however said the actual monsoon is likely to be normal this season, beginning as usual from the second week of June.

At least a couple of depressions are likely to be formed in the bay, which may cause heavy showers this month, Hossain said.

Flash floods are also on the cards this month, he said, quoting a long-range forecast for May. Heavy rains in March and April in the northeast had already caused floods, damaging rice fields.

Asked on the high temperature prevailing for the past few days, Hossain said May is the hottest month of the year. According to forecasts, there would be a spell of localised heat wave in the south-west and northwest regions in the later part of the month.

He said the heat was subdued due to heavy rainfall, but as showers paused the temperature soared.

HSC exams

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9,480 the Kamil examinations under the Madrasah Education Board.

Summary trial courts will be set up at areas adjacent to examination centres where section 144 of the CrPC within 200 yards of the centre will remain in force during the test period. Such extraordinary measures to prevent cheating are the first of their kind during a public examination in the country.

No political elements including local political leaders, student leaders and managing committee members will be allowed to enter the centres during the month-long examinations. Only the local MP will have access to centres as chairman of the local law and order committee.

Authorities will make video recordings of trouble-prone centres to identify trouble-mongers and examinees adopting unfair means in the examinations. "These video tapes will be used to trace trouble-makers and cheaters even after completion of the examination.

The education ministry will take drastic actions against educational institutions and their employees if any one is found to have rendered assistance in unfair means.

The development budget of those institutions will be stopped and its employees excluded from the monthly pay order (MPO).

These measures by the education ministry are only short-term measures against cheating but there will be long-term measures including changes in examination system, curriculum and evaluation of merit.

Loan defaulters

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that they were bank loan defaulters, he said. "The loan defaulters resort to skimming off funds and allowing them to raise funds from the market would only jeopardise the interest of small investors."

"These companies simply raised the money and are not giving any returns to the shareholders," he said.

Another senior SEC official said the decision would also stop the defaulter from eyeing the stock market as an alternative source of funds and would help the banks exert pressure on loan defaulters to return the money as they would not be allowed to arrange funds from the stock market.

The decision to bar loan defaulters would come into effect after gazette notification.

About lock-in on financial institutions, the SEC observed that lock-in had not so far been imposed on these institutions with the idea that such institutions would contribute to development of the stock market.

"We found these institutions rather taking advantage of the situation and dumping shares whenever prices soared on the secondary market," the SEC official said.

Financial institutions have so far been exempted from the lock-in on

Court orders for proper preservation of Shahriar's video cassettes

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The chief metropolitan magistrate's (CMM) court, Dhaka, yesterday granted a petition seeking proper preservation of video cassettes, seized from writer and columnist Shahriar Kabir.

The Special Branch (SB) of police seized those in connection with a seditious case against Shahriar.

Magistrate Kazi Meraj Hossain passed the order upon a petition submitted by defence lawyers.

Moving the petition, advocates Syed Rezaur Rahman, Zead-Al-Malum and Khondakar Abdul Mannan stated that the video cassettes were made on communal harmony and these are to be preserved in an air-conditioned room. If those are not kept properly, those will be damaged, they said.

The prosecution side opposed the petition.

After hearing both the sides the court granted the petition.

Meanwhile, the court also fixed June 15 for next hearing of the case. Shahriar along with his lawyers appeared before the court and prayed for fixing the next date of hearing.

The writer was arrested from Zia International airport on November 22 last year on his return from Kolkata. Police also seized his passport and some video cassettes.

A seditious case against him was filed with the CMM's court on December 8 last year.

Raozan monk

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and rally to protest the killing.

Meanwhile, Buddhist people of Sattkania and Lohagara in a Memorandum to the Prime Minister demanded immediate arrest of the killers of Gyanoyoti Mohanshah before 'Buddha Purnima', the largest religious festival of the community.

Sattkania-Lohagara Buddha Bhixmu Samity and Buddha Oikya Parishad sent the memorandum to the Prime Minister through Upazila Nirbahi Officer, Lohagara on Wednesday. They also staged demonstration before submission of the memorandum to the UNO.

Kashmir

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"They train young people and send them here to spread terrorism. What else can we expect of them?" Fernandes said, after visiting the army base and the injured.

In Pakistan, Information Minister Nisar Memon rejected India's allegation, "We will not allow any group or organization to use Pakistani soil against any country," he said. Memon warned India not to "venture" an attack on Pakistan in retaliation.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called for a meeting of all parties in Parliament to discuss the Jammu massacre.

"We have to discuss how to counter this heinous attack," he said.

Fernandes said: "We cannot have this kind of terror go unpunished, especially when the international coalition is there to fight terrorism." He ruled out immediate war, however.

He said that since India and Pakistan were part of the US-led coalition against terrorism, the situation is tricky.

"If a coalition member targets another member through terrorism, then it is time for the coalition to decide how to deal with the situation," Fernandes said.

New Delhi accuses Islamabad of training and arming the Islamic militants who have crossed the border since 1989 to fight for the independence of India's only Muslim-majority state, or its merger with Islamic Pakistan.

A Kashmiri news agency received two phone calls purporting to be from Islamic militant groups claiming responsibility for the Jammu attack, but their claims could not be verified.

Design flaws

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concerned, the Department of Shipping. Its last fitness test was conducted in October 2001. The surveyors of the Department of Shipping issued the 'fitness certificate' which expires on October 18, 2002.

According to officials at different departments concerned, fitness certificates for hundreds of passenger vessels are issued without any checks. After manufacturing, if a vessel gets its first fitness certificate it can get it renewed every year.

The surveyors under the Department of Shipping do not leave their office room to check for deviations or other irregularities, sources said. The whole process of fitness test is completed from inside the office of the surveyors, the sources added.

"Before blaming the owners, who took advantage of the irregularities in our offices I would blame the government first for failing to implement the law of the land," said a source.

The report will be handed over to the investigation committee soon. The BIWTA officials would also recommend to the Department of Shipping and the Marine Court to take action against M's S Alam and Brothers, owner of the vessel.



PHOTO: STAR

Buddhists in a procession parade down the Chittagong city streets yesterday, demanding punishment to the killers of Buddhist monk Gyanoyoti Mohasthobir.

New route to Bangkok

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recent meeting with Bangladesh Commerce Minister Amir Khasru Mahmud Chowdhury expressed his country's keen interest in opening the Asian Highway connecting his country with Bangladesh through Yangon.

Myanmar is also eager to open the stretch of the highway passing through its territory.

Bangladesh Minister for Communications Nazmul Huda is likely to visit Yangon shortly to discuss with Myanmar's public works minister bilateral cooperation with particular reference to the communication sector.

Earlier, the highway was supposed to connect Tamu, Imphal and Austogram in Sylhet. In 1995, the government opted for linking Sylhet, Tamabil, Dispur, Imphal and Tamu. The Tamabil-Sylhet route is to pass through six of the seven northeastern states of India.

The authorities in Dhaka feel that the new route will be more convenient to connect Bangladesh with Thailand through Myanmar. It will also shorten the distance by some 500 kilometres.

At the May 8-10 Bangkok expert group meet, 30 of the 31 member countries of the group sent representatives. Russia and Afghanistan were represented by senior ministers.

Different countries had constructed their portions of the Asian Highway till the 1970s. But due to earlier reluctance of Myanmar to allow international traffic, the highway from Singapore remained in use only up to Thailand. Now it is operational linking the ASEAN countries, excepting Myanmar.

Yanong's interest in the highway has now increased tremendously. The Experts Group Meeting endorsed Bangladesh's new route plan.

What is most significant is that the Experts Group in a major policy decision agreed that the highway routes will be settled mutually between neighbours on a bilateral basis.

"The decision is a landmark one and will speed up the Asian Highway process," said a top official of the communication ministry.

The old route via Tamabil and Sylhet moving through the Indian states is still in the plan, an official said, but its implementation would require further bilateral discussions between Dhaka and Delhi, he explained.

The Teknaf connection

Officials say the newly proposed Asian Highway entering Myanmar through Teknaf will make it easily functional with less investment at an early stage.

The original route plan linked Chittagong on a regional basis. The road link between Chittagong and Cox's Bazar as part of the national network is very good. Only the road from Cox's Bazar to Teknaf needs to be developed, communication officials say.

A bridge over the river Naaf or ferry service connecting Teknaf and Maungdaw could immediately facilitate traffic movement on the Myanmar road onwards to Thailand.

In the subcontinent, international traffic could not start due to disagreements among the countries concerned. In West Asia, several Middle-Eastern countries up to Turkey are directly linked with the Asian Highway network.

With China joining the Asian Highway plan in 1988, Myanmar in 1989 and seven central Asian countries in 1996, its prospect has become even brighter.

Conceived by 15 countries under the ESCAP in 1959, the highway now conceptually links 31 countries. Bangladesh joined the highway plan in 1959 with the then Pakistan government consenting to it. In 1976, the route map of the highway showing Bangladesh was first published.

OC of Mollahat thana suspended

UNB, Bagerhat

The officer in charge (OC) of Mollahat police station has been suspended for negligence of duty in dealing with Nasreen suicide case.

The action was taken on Monday against the OC, Mohammad Jalal Uddin, as per directive from the Police Headquarters, police sources said here yesterday.

Earlier, the investigating officer of the same case Subhash Chandra was also suspended.

Schoolgirl Nasreen Akhter, who was raped on February 10 this year, committed suicide on May 2 as police failed to arrest anyone in this connection.

Police foil RNC rally at Rajshahi

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Rajshahi

Police foiled a meeting of Rajshahi Nagorik Committee (RNC) at Binodpur bazar in the city yesterday.

The RNC convened the meeting at the bazar at 7 pm to protest 'fake voting' in the Rajshahi City Corporation polls held on April 25.

RNC mayoral candidate Fazle Hossain Badsha alleged that police prevented RNC leaders and workers from holding a meeting at the venue.

Later, the leaders and activists of RNC held a meeting at Kamela Haq College field in Binodpur area with Ramjan Ali, convener of Binodpur unit of RNC in the chair.

Khoka's first task

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challenge, he affirmed.

He promised to do his best to resolve the longstanding crisis facing the citizens in Dhaka. "But I will never promise something unrealistic...I am well aware of our resource constraints and I should not expect the government to develop the capital in a way that deprives the rest of the country."

Khoka also pledged not to do anything against the interests of the people living in the city. "Many come to Dhaka for a living not by choice, which is why we have to give a second thought before being harsh in resolving certain problems."

"I don't pledge to solve the longstanding crises overnight for I don't have any divine power nor do I have unlimited power. I cannot do anything unless I get cooperation of all," he said. He underlined a united effort in freeing the capital from its problems.

To this end, the new mayor said, he seeks cooperation from his predecessor and other former

mayors, and would tap into their experience.

Despite being asked, Khoka preferred not to say anything blaming his predecessor Mohammad Hanif who ended over eight years in office on Tuesday. He seemed polite and generous when replying to questions about Hanif's rule.

"I prefer not to accuse him (Hanif) of outstanding credits of Tk 467 crore the DCC is now burdened with. Instead, I will try to get rid of it at the earliest," he told a questioner. "I think I have many things to learn from him who was the longest-serving mayor of Dhaka."

To a query about corrupt practices in the DCC, Khoka said corruption is rooted everywhere in the society and it's an age-old crisis in our country. And, the DCC is no exception. "What I will try to do is ensure that no fresh act of corruption takes place during my tenure as mayor."

Khoka avoided a direct reply to a question if he would continue with all three public offices of a minister and

an MP in addition to his latest office as mayor. "I don't undermine any of the three jobs the people have entrusted me with."

The mayor did not say if he would increase holding tax for the city dwellers as reported in some newspapers. "I don't say I will raise the tax nor do I say I won't. Whatever I will do will be based on reality."

About a proposed metropolitan government, he said that there should be an effective coordination among all service organisations. "And, coordination must be DCC-centred. Whether a coordination body is guided by Prime Minister's Office or the local government ministry does not matter."

Khoka promised legal action against those responsible for faulty footbridges, two of them had meantime collapsed. Also, he pledged to retrieve the city parks, playgrounds and the Buriganga no matter he needed to go beyond his authority.

Highway robbery

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On the night of May 9, a group of about 40 armed criminals looted Tk. 5,00,000 as well as gold ornaments and other valuables from the houses of 13 Hindu families at Basantapur in Shingra. They also beat up about 30 people including women and children during the dacoity.

On the night of May 10, four houses of Shahanagar and Chatail villages of Sherpur upazila in Bogra were looted during which ten people including four women were injured by the marauding bandits. Three days before this incident, eight houses were looted at Tirol village of the same upazila.

On the night of May 8, dacoits looted valuables worth Tk. two lakh from the house of one Bakul Sarder, a rice trader of Raghunathpur in Mohadevpur upazila in the Naogaon district.

On the same night, at least five rice-laden trucks were looted at gunpoint in separate incidents at Kathom and Dhakur areas of Nandigram in Bogra district.

Meanwhile, the rice traders and truckers of Naogaon district protesting the alarming rise in highway robbery had called an indefinite

Shikdar's men

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Once controlled by Ershad Shikdar, the ghat was captured by the BNP-backed group in January without seeking mandate from workers.

Soon after capturing the union from the AL-backed group, the BNP-backed workers started reconstruction of structures demolished by police after arrest of Ershad Shikdar on August 11, 1999.

The BNP-backed workers allegedly captured several plots of railway land once occupied illegally by Ershad Shikdar and his armed cadres. It is alleged that a group of criminals backed by a top leader of city BNP are involved in illegal occupation of land, smuggling and drug trafficking, pilferage of fuel from rail wagons and foodgrains from barges.

MCCI: Investment

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MCCI Secretary General CK Hyder said governance has improved in some areas, but

the biggest hitch is the deteriorating law and order.

He said the government should take steps to establish an independent anti-corruption commission, the office of the ombudsman and other institutions necessary to establish good governance.

Despite strains on the economy, the MCCI expects a GDP growth rate of about five per cent in the current fiscal owing to a satisfactory growth in the service sector.

"Notwithstanding the setback to the export sector and lower aman crop production, satisfactory service sector growth may help achieve a growth rate of over five per cent," Hyder commented.

Tapan said there are some positive trends in the economy like increased foreign exchange remittance and tax collection and decline in government borrowing from the bank.

"Still, the government has to take requisite reforms to improve competitiveness of the economy and invest more in the social sector," he added.

"The government should cut down subsidies to the state-owned enterprises (SoEs) by at least 30 per

strike and stopped supplying rice to other parts of the country.

They however called off their strike after Telecommunication Minister Barrister Aminul Haque and State Minister for Agriculture Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir assured them of taking appropriate measures for their safety.

During the divisional law and order meeting on Sunday, Rajshahi divisional commissioner Md. Azir Uddin Ahmed and Rajshahi range DIG of Police Md. Shahidur Rahman Bhuiyan expressed their deep concern at the alarming rise in crimes, particularly robberies.

They also asked the DCs and SPs of 16 northern districts to take up strict security measures on highways and to launch special drives against identified dacoits.

Matir Moina

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political persons in a madrassah, who had a positive role in the freedom struggle, contrary to popular perception. His portrayal of madrassah education contrasts radically with western depiction of such institutions, he noted.

Referring to earlier decision of the Censor Board, he said, "The full quorum of the Censor Board saw the film in my presence and through majority votes decided to certify it. The print of the film was returned to me and I was told that the certificate would be ready by the next day."

Two days later, Tareque was told that the higher authorities would promptly issue the certificate and he arranged screening of the film again. Later, the Censor Board verbally told him to reduce a scene showing processions of the 1969 mass movement. "In the bigger interest, I reduced the sound level," he added.

Tareque observed that some over-enthusiastic political activists have influenced a section in the government to ban the film-- a decision that would actually lower the image of the government abroad. He expressed the hope that the government will re-evaluate the film and see it for what it is, a very sensitive portrayal of a multi-cultural and a multi-religious Bangladesh.

cent and spend the money in short gestation public works projects. Such spending will stimulate demand and will be of significant benefit to the local market-oriented industries," Hyder said.

Talking on the next budget, the MCCI said there should be financial provisions, on priority basis, to help overcome the economic slow-down. Fiscal and monetary measures should also be there to restore manufacturing competitiveness.

It also suggested continuation of the tax holiday scheme and the PSI system with efforts to put a cap on misuse of the systems.

Gangsters

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wanted criminals.

On the heels of rising crimes, the government decided to continue a special joint drive with the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) and ansar to net notorious criminals and improve law and order.

The government also constituted a 'national committee to fight daring criminals and to conduct joint drive'.

On the third day, BDR forces were seen patrolling different parts of the city. Traffic police have also been assisting the mainstream law enforcers.

Indo-Pak war

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undermine peace in the region. I think acts that occurred in Jammu are terrorism. No matter what the levels are, infiltration must stop," Rocca said.

"Terrorism is something that is unacceptable whether in India or Pakistan. This is absolutely unacceptable."

Rocca warned that incidents like the Jammu attack would do nothing to calm the mood between India and Pakistan, who have amassed about one million troops along their border since a December attack on India's parliament by Islamic extremists allegedly linked to Pakistan.

"We certainly think that the level of tension needs to be eased and acts like yesterday (Tuesday) are clearly aimed to achieve the opposite objective... (they) are intended to undermine peace in the region and stability in the region as a whole," the US official added.

Washington was worried about the "continued mobilisation of two major armies facing each other in close proximity and the threat caused by a spark... that could lead to an unintended conflict", Rocca said.

The United States was "working hard to ease" the tension between the two countries, she said, adding that there was "always room for the hope" that New Delhi and Islamabad would seek dialogue.

"We always encourage both sides to talk... conflicts cannot be solved without a dialogue."

Rocca, however, ruled out any role for the United States or a third country in finding a solution to the Kashmir dispute, saying that India and Pakistan should resolve the problem themselves.

Chilaverts

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before beginning their finals campaign on June 2 in Busan, South Korea against South Africa. Group B also contains Slovenia.

"If Spain had played in the South American qualifiers, I am sure they would not be going to the World Cup," Chilavert said.

The comments were his latest criticisms of Spanish football, coming days after he said the richness of the sport in the country was down to their foreign imports.