

New Russia-NATO council 'historic step forward'

AFP, Moscow

The signing of the Rome Declaration giving Moscow a role in Atlantic alliance decision-making is a "historic step forward," the head of NATO's military committee said in Moscow yesterday as he prepared to inaugurate a military liaison mission.

The official's comments came on the eve of a summit of Russian and NATO heads of state in Rome where they are to create a new council that will enable the erstwhile Cold War foes to take common positions in a number of predefined areas.

"This is a historic step forward. The essential thing now is that we can now take together all the impor-

Feeble dialogue

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Asked about the dialogue, Abdul Hamid ridiculed the government for inviting the opposition to negotiation while continuing political persecution of the opponents.

"Even lives of our MPs are not secure let alone those of the ordinary activists. Whom shall we take to the parliament if the lawmakers feel insecure?" he said, citing the armed attack on Nasim's motorcade in his own constituency.

The deputy opposition leader said Hasina was informed of the government's talks offer on her return home late last week. The AL would reach a decision on the matter after further discussions in the party, he said.

Not totally disheartened by the AL's ignoring its dialogue initiative, the BNP is learnt to have been planning for yet another move by the speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad.

Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, who returned from Canada yesterday, may offer himself to mediate a government-opposition dialogue aimed at ending the opposition boycott of the parliament, BNP

Shanu takes oath

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Acting Mayor Moniruzzaman Mamun administered the oath in presence of other ward commissioners and high officials. Shanu was elected from Ward No. 26.

The entire KCC office was cordoned by armed police till Shanu went back to jail.

The order for his release on parole for the oath-taking was given by the ADM of Khulna in consultation with higher authorities, sources said.

Shanu is accused in the Rob murder case, trial of which began yesterday in the court of the Additional District and Sessions Judge (one), Khulna. Shanu and others accused in the case were produced before the court and put on the dock.

Shanu's lawyers prayed for his bail and exemption from the murder charge on ground of his being elected a ward commissioner. But the judge rejected the prayers and sent him to jail custody after the charge-framing. He was later released on parole for the oath-taking.

The court fixed June 23, 24, 25, 26, 29 and 30 for hearing prosecution witnesses in the case in connection with the murder of Awami League's mayoral candidate ASM Rob. The absconding accused in the case are Tapan, Osikur Rahman, Mushfaque Rahman , Sahkeen, Sumon, and Dalia Sultana. Fifteen persons are FIR-named accused in the case.

Chargesheeted in 13 criminal cases including the Rob murder case, Shanu surrendered to court on May 20. The court sent him to district jail, rejecting his bail prayer.

According to unconfirmed sources, Golam Mawla Shanu surrendered to court in consultation with two top central leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami, a component of the ruling four-party alliance. One of them is a cabinet minister while the other is a member of parliament from Khulna-5 constituency.

The sources said Sahnur met the cabinet minister in Dhaka before deciding to surrender. He was accompanied by the MP who is also the city Ameer of Jamaat. Shanu was asked by the home ministry to surrender. This arrangement was made through these two Jamaat leaders, the source said.

According to police records, the listed criminal is, in fact, a cadre of Islami Chhatra Shibir. Jamaat gave him full support in the last KCC election from behind the scene.

Bhiza

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Rahman on April 27. Rahman, in a critical condition, was later handed over to Sadar Police being identified as an extortionist.

While in police custody, Rahman's health deteriorated and he was admitted to the Kushtia General Hospital.

Later, the journalist was given an ad-interim bail against a bond and shifted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH) as his condition deteriorated further.

After treatment at the DMCH, the journalist was on his way to the Sadar Police Station in order to surrender to the police on May 12. But the police arrested Rahman in another extortion case and he was sent to the Kushtia jail with the one-month detention order.

Local newsmen condemned the arrest and the detention order as illegal and demanded his immediate release. Local journalist leaders in a meeting held yesterday threatened to go on a movement unless Rahman was released.

Trader knifed

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Kachua of Chandpur district and he used to supply green leaves to flowershops.

Meanwhile, mystery shrouds the death of a young man whose body was recovered from the ground floor of a 16-storied under-construction building at Segun Bagicha in the city yesterday morning.

Sources said the victim, Debashish Goswami, 25, son of Sunil Goswami, came out of his brother's house at Siddheswari at about 10 Sunday night. Since then he was missing.

Police recovered his body and sent it to the DMCH morgue for autopsy. The body bore marks of injury.

An unnatural death (UD) case was filed with Ramna thana in this connection.

Pakistan rushes to increase uranium stockpile

AFP, London

Pakistani scientists have been working secretly round the clock for the past three years to accelerate production of weapons-grade uranium, Britain's the Times newspaper reported yesterday, quoting a leading Pakistani nuclear physicist.

This means Pakistan may have more nuclear warheads than previously believed, the paper suggested.

Pervez Hoodbhoy, professor of nuclear physics at Quaid-e-Azam university in Islamabad, said there were clear indications that the nuclear warheads were already in place on missiles.

"We are much closer to a nuclear confrontation with India than at any other time," he warned.

Hoodbhoy told the Times the scientists had been working in three shifts over the past three years.

For the Times, his disclosure raised the possibility that Pakistan could assemble more nuclear warheads than the estimated 30 to 50 it is generally thought to have.

Each warhead would have the same explosive power as the atomic bomb dropped over the Japanese city of Hiroshima in 1945.

Musharraf

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Kashmir and in the state of Gujarat with an appeal for dialogue to resolve differences between the two nations.

"no infiltration"

Musharraf said Pakistan would always support the struggle of the mainly Muslim Kashmiri people against Indian rule, but would not allow its territory to be used as a base "for terrorism against anybody."

He also want to tell the world and give the assurance that no infiltration is taking place across the Line of Control," he said.

"But I want to make one thing clear. Liberation movement is going on in occupied Kashmir and Pakistan cannot be held responsible for any action against Indian tyranny and repression."

Musharraf appealed for national unity in the face of the threat of war and also promised to hold parliamentary elections between October 7 and 11.

Zidane

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x-ray and Zinedine Zidane will be absent for two matches.

"For the moment, that's the result of the x-ray," said Simonet who remained upbeat despite France losing their star player.

Simonet said: "If you want to be world champions, you have to be prepared to play from time to time without one of your stars."

Zidane spent the second-half of the friendly against Korea holding an ice pack to his left thigh and a test later revealed a small tear of the median third of the quadriceps.

He underwent further tests on Monday, but coach Roger Lemerre said he would only get a diagnosis on the former world player of the year on Tuesday.

Lemerre admitted he would be worried by Zoidane's absence.

The World Champions' coach said: "The French group is obviously stronger with him."

"Zidane is an exceptional player and when he is in the team he always gives it life."

To highlight his point, Lemerre's team struggled to victory in Zidane's absence.

"When a team like Korea is playing in front of a home crowd they are a very hard team to beat," Lemerre said.

"But then again we never gave up and we managed to win the game after falling behind."

"We had a difficult time with their strength of spirit - Guus Hiddink has done well," he added of South Korea's Dutch coach.

A French XI beat South Korean club side Anyang Cheetahs 2-1 in a friendly match in Seoul on Monday.

The goals came from Thierry Henry and Djibril Cisse. France's Mikael Sylvestre scored an own goal.

Bigger ADP

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Since 1991, the closest growth to this year's was that of FY94 when the ADP spiked 18.2 per cent. During the post-flood period, in FY01, the government however went in for an expansionary spree yielding 17.9 per cent growth in development spending.

But time series data show that never in the history did revenue expenditure match such a high growth. Exception is FY92 when resource mobilisation witnessed a big jump of 21.7 per cent thanks to the introduction of VAT.

But since then the result is mostly double-digit growths on the lower range barring some years when it even dipped to single digits.

But now, with such a jumbo ADP and no signs of an arrest in revenue expenditure -- rather it is likely to increase because of, among other things, inclusion of 25,000 project staff in revenue budget -- the fiscal deficit is set to widen further, economists observe, leading to increased bank borrowing or mopping up of private savings.

And still worrisome is that the ADP will remain questionable with low priority projects with political bias.

Because of resource situation, we now so urgently need to check on quality of projects and their intended outcome to justify each and every project in the ADP," said Dr Wahiduddin Mahmud at a workshop on 'budget and budget reporting' at a local hotel yesterday.

Salvage uncertain

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BIWTA officials however said they were still hopeful of salvaging the vessel with the help of the navy. But they said they would need a second salvage unit, MV Rustam for any sort of salvage operation. The MV Hamza and Rustam have a combined lifting capacity of 120 tons.

BIWTA officials in Dhaka said it would take Rustam four days to arrive at the remote Kathacheera village from where it is anchored in Narayanganj.

They said they had already faxed the 'sketch design' of the sunken vessel to Barisal from where it would be sent to the spot later.

At around 1:00pm yesterday, the DIG of police in Barisal, Golam Mostafa said 30 bodies were recovered from the river. The ETV last night however reported the number of recovered bodies to be around 40.

Mostafa said the BIWTA salvage unit Hamza, which arrived on the spot Saturday morning, was not properly equipped with deepwater diving facilities and was therefore unable to salvage the ship.

Commander of the BNS Teesta assisting with the rescue operation since Sunday said the 'sketch map' of MV Subha will help navy divers recover the bodies trapped inside the vessel. The 80-ton steel vessel, meanwhile, would have to be left on the riverbed for an indefinite period, sources said.

Sources in the BIWTA said the 80-ton steel-bodied vessel built in the year 2000 had a passenger capacity of 78 during nighttime and 117-175 during daytime. The 90-foot long, 239-Horse Power single engine vessel could ply eight nautical miles an hour.

Caught up in a violent nor'wester, the MV Subha sank in the river Baleshwar at around 10:30pm Thursday with about 150 passengers on board, 45 minutes after it had left Charduani for Khulna. According to authorities concerned, about 17 people including two

women swam ashore.

Local people said they have so far recovered 31 floating, decomposed bodies from the seven-kilometre wide river Baleshwar by the Sundarbans, about 110 kilometres south of the Barisal divisional headquarters.

Meanwhile, hundreds of people are still looking for their missing relatives on the banks of the river Baleswar. Many came to the spot walking over 15 miles on the earthen muddy road. Hundreds of villagers from the neighbouring villages have also joined the crowd to witness the salvage operations.

Noor Mohammad and his wife had rushed to Mathbaria from Khulna on Saturday on whatever public transport they could avail. The couple had learned that Noor's brother-in-law Habibur Rahman, his wife Mahmuda Parul, their two daughters Lira and Leena, their youngest child -- an 18-month old baby boy, and his wife's brother Dulal were on board the MV Subha when it sank.

Noor Mohammad knew the entire family of Habibur Rahman was reported missing and their chances of survival were nil. Habib worked as a stenographer at the upazila office of Fultala in Khulna, and led a decent life there. The Rahman family hailed from Gyanpara village of Charduani Union and they had boarded the ill-fated launch from there after hosting the akika of their only son.

Noor Mohammad moving from corpse to corpse looking for his near and dear ones. He had raised Habib in his own home helping the young man to graduate.

"I cannot believe Habib is dead along with all his family members," said Noor Mohammad moving desperately along the bank of the river Baleshwar.

At the end of the day, Noor identified four of his relatives. Habibur Rahman, his son and two daughters. Parul was still missing.

Hasina: No moral right

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Minister Mohammad Nasim and killed party leader Abdur Quddus in Sirajganj, how BDR tortured 15 people at Siddhirganj keeping Narayanganj police in the dark and "BNP terrorists" continued armed attacks on Shamim Osman's paternal home and his elder brother's businesses.

In her 3-page written statement Hasina also mentioned the killing of Ashrafui Alam Soheli in Lalmonirhat, Kapashia thana Jubo League leader Jamaluddin Fakir, Rugganj thana Awami League leader Fazlul Huq Bhuiyan, Dhaka city Chhatra League leader Siddhartha Sarker, Rajshahi Jubo League leader Waziuddin Dulu and Awami League worker Khalilur Rahman in Chandpur.

She also deplored the killing of Buddhist Monk Gyanjyoti Mohathero at Razuan and Hindu priest Madan Mohan Goswami at Manikchhari.

Referring to the Chandpur launch disaster when hundreds of people were killed, she said the "anti-people" BNP-Jamaat government behaved inhumanly and cruelly by not taking quick steps in recovering bodies.

Despite newspaper reports with photographs of dead bodies, she observed, the government remained shamelessly silent and did not provide any help or financial compensation to victims' families. In 1991 too, the Khaleda government behaved similarly after a devastating cyclone in Chittagong.

Referring to Finance Minister Saifur Rahman's comment that project works worth Tk 15,000 crore undertaken in the health sector by Awami League government went in

vain, Hasina called it a blatant lie. As a matter of fact, this government has closed down many projects because of "political meanness", she said.

In a counteroffensive, the opposition leader quoted Finance Minister Saifur Rahman to have repeatedly stated in public that international donors and agencies would not give any assistance until good governance is established, and human rights and law-and-order situation are improved.

"It's explicit in his statements that there is no rule of law, the country is under fascism and the rule of hell," Hasina said.

Bina murder

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them to be shown arrested. They also submitted another petition for placing the accused on seven days' remand in connection with the Bina murder case.

After hearing, Magistrate Sirajul Haider granted the prayer for showing the accused arrested in the Bina murder case and ordered to place them on a two-day remand for interrogation.

Binoy Krishna Sarkar Bina, a ruling BNP-backed ward commissioner (Wary No. 72) of the Dhaka City Corporation (DCC) was shot dead by three unidentified gunmen at Tanti Bazar Sharnapatti in the old part of the city on May 22.

Sharika Sarkar, wife of the slain commissioner filed a murder case with Kotwali thana on Saturday accusing 26 people, including local BNP leader Mosarraf Hossain Ripon.

In the FIR, she alleged Ripon and his accomplice Ranajit killed her husband.

Oklahoma bridge

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said officials, who added that they hope to have all vehicles pulled from the river by yesterday afternoon.

A temporary morgue has been set up at a local high school, authorities said.

Three bodies were pulled from the river late Sunday from three separate vehicles just before recovery efforts were suspended.

Recovery efforts were hampered by rough waters and the fear that the barge, which was trapped under the collapsed section of bridge, might shift, causing more of the 606-meter span to collapse.

Officials said the barge, the Robert Y. Love, is owned by Magnolia Marine Transportation Company of Vicksburg, Mississippi.

The barge was empty and headed north on the river at the time of the accident. It apparently was going to pick up a load of asphalt, although officials were uncertain of its destination.

"It's a sad and sorrowful day for us in Oklahoma," said Governor Frank Keating, who toured the scene.

"The loss of life is unbearable for all of us. This is happening on Memorial Day weekend when people are traveling from all over the country," said Keating, adding that he had already issued a disaster

Drastic steps soon to bring discipline in Titas Gas

UNB, Dhaka

A high-level meeting yesterday decided that drastic steps would be taken to restore discipline in the state-owned Titas Gas company and tame those opposing a move for privatising the loss-incurring Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC).

Sources said the meeting with State Minister for Energy AKM Mosharraf Hossain in the chair took it seriously that an employee of Eastern Refinery, which will not be privatised, was leading an agitation against privatisation of Padma, Meghna and Jamuna oil companies.

"How a person of Eastern Refinery was made chairman of the action committee that called a strike against privatisation of BPC? Why a person of Eastern Refinery that will not be privatised is here?" the minister was learnt to have put the questions at the meeting.

Rejoinder

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age of union leaders of Titas Gas, which is not correct."

"There is no political patronage and no cabinet minister has interfered in trade union issues in Titas gas. Rather, this is for the first time after a decade that the present government has politically resolved union matter in Titas gas".

Our Reply:

The following facts substantiate our report:

a. The Petrobangla letter seeking compensation claim was issued through an official process in which the energy ministry itself was a party. The energy ministry and the Petrobangla Board approved the content of the letter twice and it was vetted by legal experts. Yet the letter was not sent to Unocal.

b. On May 15, Petrobangla was dispatching the compensation claim letter to Unocal when the state minister called Petrobangla chairman over phone and asked him not to submit the letter without further scrutiny by PSC experts.

c. On May 19, Unocal chief went on record, saying that the company 'has settled' the compensation for damaging Magurchhara gas reserve. The Daily Star printed how Petrobangla officials unofficially viewed such an arbitrary claim. Yet, till date, the energy ministry did not come up with any official statement to counter Unocal's claim or clarify the government position about the compensation claim.

d. Regarding Titas, we stand by our story.

Warnings

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was no authority there to check. The office of the Inspector was seen locked.

When asked, two policemen at the crowded terminal also said they did not see the inspectors.

Hundreds of passengers were seen crammed in each of the half a dozen vessels anchored at the jetty. On the MV Sampad, this correspondent counted 471 passengers on one floor of the triple-decker vessel. There were passengers everywhere in the large vessel. People slept on the corridors, decks and on any open space they found.

The same scene was at Sagar-6, Parabat and all other large vessels leaving Barisal between 6-30 pm and 8-00 pm. Passengers said these large vessels have two engines each and they are 'very reliable'. They said passengers now avoid travelling on small vessels with one engine due to risk of sinking.

The vessel operators said although the vessel looked crowded, it was 'not overloaded at all' as the load-line was well above the safety level.

BIWTA officials in Dhaka said owners deliberately declare the capacity of their vessels less than the actual capacity to avoid tax. Most of the vessels can carry larger number of passengers than officially permitted, they said.

Power project

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ahead with the on-going project as per the project consultant's recommendations without the JBIC consent.

Earlier, a PDB tender committee on the evaluation of the three bidders -- Marubeni, Mitsubishi and Mitsui -- observed that the project's consultant Mott MacDonald had side with Marubeni and had technically disqualified Mitsui though the both had same qualifications.

Conceived in 1991, the expansion project outlines a cost of 151 billion Japanese yen which, in local currency, stands at Tk 416 crores or around US\$66 million.

It is possible to set up a new 180 MW power plant with such a finance instead of adding a 109 MW system to the existing 100 MW power plant. The 36MW Haripur AES private power plant commissioned last year was set up at a cost of \$126 million.

The ERD last year had held that a fresh tender should be floated for the project on the basis of revised designs and specifications to accommodate the latest technology and low-cost options.

The meeting dismissed the propaganda that the BPC is a profitable concern, noting that it loses Tk 450 crore annually only on diesel import. It also loses 64 paisa per litre selling local diesel.

"Private-sector entrepreneurs told the government that they pay the same tax as BPC now gives, making sales at the same prices as the BPC sells. In that case, why the government will incur huge losses every year," Mosharraf told the top officials.

He, however, assured that a completely transparent policy would be followed in privatising Padma, Meghna and Jamuna -- three subsidiaries of the state owned BPC. Shares of Padma, already 49 per cent owned by private sector, will be sold out as per market rates.

Sources said the meeting decided to determine the value of the state-owned loss making oil companies, which were in private

sector 30 years ago through a joint committee of engineers and accountants. Later, the companies will be sold out through open tender.

"Officials and employees of the three companies had been in private sector. Why are they opposing the privatisation process? The only reason is that if privatised, they will not be able to make money through theft and adulteration," the minister told UNB after the meeting.

Meanwhile, sources said the meeting held at the energy ministry asked the Titas Gas authorities to take stern action against its employees involved in alleged gas stealing. It also asked for audit of all ledgers to check the heist.

To restore discipline in Titas and check gas stealing that entails loss of crores of taka on the government exchequer, the meeting also asked for framing fresh rules and regulations with regard to management, purchases and accounts.

Miladunnabi observed

UNB, Dhaka

Holy Eid-e-Miladunnabi, the birth and death anniversary of the great Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM), was observed in the country Sunday with due solemnity and religious fervour.

On this day, the 12th Rabiul Awal, Prophet Hazrat Muhammad (SM) came to this universe with divine blessings and message of peace for mankind. He also passed away on this day.

Muslims across the country observed the day by holding various programmes, including milad and waz mehflis, discussion meetings and special prayers.

The day was a public holiday. President AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury, Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and Opposition Leader Sheikh Hasina gave separate messages on the eve of the sacred day.

Bangladesh Betar and TV channels put up special programmes on the life and achievements of the prophet.

To mark the day, different religious, socio-cultural and political organisations held various programmes.

Islamic Foundation began a

fortnight's programme Saturday at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque while Tarikate Moula Group held a seminar and milad mehfil at the mazar on the High Court premises in the morning.

Bangladesh Muslim League and Bangladesh Progressive Party held discussions in their offices highlighting the ideals and teachings of Hazrat Muhammad (SM).

Kendriya Phoolkuri Ashar organised a seminar titled "Nabi Dibashey Shishu Shamabesh" at National Press Club where State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Ebadur Rahman Chowdhury was present as chief guest.

Chaired by president of the organisation MA Rashid Chowdhury, the seminar was addressed, among others, by Salahuddin Ahmed, MP, poet Al Mahmud and Mesbahuddin Mahin.

Discussions and special doa mehflis were held at the central mosque of Jahangirnagar University. Vice Chancellor Prof Jasimuddin Ahmed was the main speaker.

Special prayers, doa mehflis and discussions on the life of Prophet Muhammad (SM) were held in mosques across the country.

Shafiur gets bail

Former Dhaka City Corporation Mayor Mohammad Hanif and Alamgir, the then secretary to the government, were 'architects of the Janatar Mancha', said the complaint.

Alamgir, also accused in the sedition case, was arrested at the Zia International Airport on March 15 on his return home from Singapore under the Section 54 of the CrPC. Later, he was shown arrested in the sedition case.

Listed criminals

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Five other listed criminals were also arrested from other areas of the country during the period. They include Chora Babu and Jahid arrested in Khulna metropolitan area, Bablu, arrested in Meherpur and Rawshan arrested in Kushtia.

Police also arrested 1373 wanted criminals and 1379 people in connection with cases in different districts. Eighteen people were arrested with firearms and nine firearms were recovered during the period.

Five explosives were recovered from of the city and two from Faridpur. Four persons were arrested from Faridpur for possessing explosives, the press release said.

MBA admission

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