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Myanmar PM due tomorrow with road link agenda



General Than Shwe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Myanmar Prime Minister General Than Shwe flies in Dhaka tomorrow on a two-day visit to Bangladesh.

A foreign ministry announcement yesterday described the visit as "landmark" that intends to bolster bilateral cooperation, particularly in trade and commerce.

"This will be the first high-profile meet between Bangladesh and Myanmar in the last 16 years," Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan told a press conference at his ministry in the afternoon.

Shwe, the senior general who also heads the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC) of Myanmar, will lead a large delegation for wide-ranging talks with Bangladesh leaders.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia will receive her Myanmar counterpart at Zia International Airport, according to the foreign ministry statement released after the press conference.

The two prime ministers would hold officials talks tomorrow afternoon at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), the release said adding the

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Bail getter prefers jail custody to army arrest

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four of the accused in the Sutrapur double murder case yesterday had their bails cancelled by the court and went to jail custody to escape army arrest.

Sources said a team of army acting on information went to the District and Sessions Judge's Court, Dhaka in a bid to arrest five of the accused in the case who were on bail.

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Efforts to continue for neighbourly ties with India: FM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan said yesterday that Bangladesh would continue dialogue to maintain neighbourly relations with India.

Asked what the government would do to improve Dhaka's strained relation with New Delhi on the question of al-Qaeda, the minister told a press conference at the foreign ministry, "There is nothing to

improve."

It is a section of Indian newspapers that campaigned for the fictitious al-Qaeda story in Bangladesh, he said.

About the comments by Indian Minister for External Affairs Yashwant Sinha and Defence Minister George Fernandez suspecting al-Qaeda's presence in

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PHOTO: STAR

Determined to make the freedom count.

The day we won freedom

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The nation today celebrates the 31st anniversary of its independence earned through a nine-month bloody war against Pakistan.

People will pay rich tributes to the memory of three million martyrs who sacrificed their lives for an independent Bangladesh, and pledge anew to build a happy and prosperous nation dreamt by them.

The Victory Day will be heralded with a 31-gun salute at dawn. It is a public holiday.

The government, political parties and different socio-cultural

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Army men sued for death in custody

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A woman yesterday charged an army major and his troops with the murder of her husband during interrogation. This is for the first time that such a case was filed during the ongoing joint drive against criminals.

Mehnaz Hossain Anjan, wife of a poultry farm owner, Abul Hossain Litu, lodged the case against one Major Kabir and his companions who were on duty at the Savar army camp.

In her case filed with the First Class Magistrate's Court, Dhaka, Mehnaz accused the major and his accompanying troops of the Savar army camp of killing her husband on October 28 this year.

A total of 30 persons have so far been killed after arrests by army during the ongoing drive by the joint

forces since October 17.

In her complaint, Mehnaz told the court that on October 28, the major and some other army personnel went to her husband's poultry farm, Matsa Poultry Farm, at about 1:00pm and cordoned off the area.

"Without explaining anything, they entered the farm. My husband was then taking bath. Army tied up his hands, legs and eyes and beat him up mercilessly after tying him to a tree," she said.

"At one stage, they termed my husband a top listed criminal of the Seven Star group and asked him to hand over his firearms," said the wife in her petition.

She said her husband told army that he was not a criminal and had no firearms in his possession. "The army personnel then thoroughly searched the poultry farm with metal

detector but found no firearms, which made them angry and they tortured my husband."

Mehnaz alleged that her husband died during torture. "Then, they covered my husband's body with a bed sheet and took it away in their vehicle," she added.

She alleged that army called up Savar police and forced them to prepare an inquest report. They later handed over the body to the police at around midnight, she added.

As a cover-up, army circulated that the victim got himself seriously injured by jumping off the first floor of the farm and later succumbed to injuries at the Combined Military Hospital at Savar, she said. But there are no two-storied buildings in the farm compound, she informed the court.

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Police probe Reuters newsmen's 'political, intelligence links'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Detective Branch of Police is probing whether local journalists at the Dhaka bureau of Reuters have links with any political parties or any foreign intelligence agency.

According to sources, the detectives have changed their tack and are questioning local Reuters stringer Enamul Haque Chowdhury in this line.

On Saturday, at a meeting with

editors of different print and electronic media on Saturday, Information Minister Tariqul Islam accused the international wire service of playing a part in an international conspiracy to tarnish Bangladeshi image.

The detectives are also checking out whether the particular report was part of an international campaign to portray Bangladesh as a haven of al-Qaeda or other militant

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Akheri Munajat offered

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Millions of devotees joined the Akheri Munajat of the Biswa Ijtema in Tongi yesterday, seeking peace and prosperity for the Muslim Ummah.

Many, especially the aged, burst into tears during the 14-minute concluding prayers led by Moulana Jobayyer Hasan from India.

More than four thousand foreigners from 60 countries also joined the munajat of the three-day congregation.

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Slave islands

Hundreds of trafficked children forced into slavery

A ROVING CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred children aged between five and 15 have been forced into virtual slavery in a number of islands on the Bay of Bengal near the Sunderbans.

Organised gangs either trafficked or lured them to these islands including Dublar Char, Alor Kol, Meher Ali, Tiar Char and Dimer Char in Rangabali area in Bagerhat.

The children are forced to work day and night in an inhuman condition to keep the seasonal fishing and fish processing industry running for about five months. These islands are not easily accessible because of their remoteness and lack of security. Once captured and taken to these islands, the children do not have any scope to escape.

They are forced to do most of the hard work in the industry. They are engaged in building makeshift houses, sorting fishes, washing and drying nets, cooking, cleaning fishing boats, procuring firewood, carrying loads and packaging. There are also allegations of sexual abuse

of the children by the men around them.

Despite their hard work for months, these children virtually get nothing. When the season is over, many of them are kept confined in villages along the Sunderbans or in Dublar Char. According to villagers, if a child falls sick during his 'captivity,' he gets no medical care whatsoever. In case of death, the body is either thrown into the sea or buried in the forest.

Mohammad Shahidul Islam, now about 15, was abducted from Madrassah Road in Mongla five years ago and taken to Dublar Char. His father Mohammad Ishak looked for him everywhere possible. At last, Shahidul got back home due to a recent raid by the joint forces engaged in the countrywide anti-crime drive. He said that during the last five years, he desperately tried to escape but failed and was subjected to torture and abuse for this.

With the launching of anti-crime drive, the joint forces led by the Coast Guards raided some of these

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HC rule on govt on detention of Shahriar, Shafi, Muntasir

UNB, Dhaka

The High Court yesterday issued rule upon the government to show cause as to why the detention of Shahriar Kabir, Prof Muntasir Mamoon and Shafi Ahmed should not be declared illegal.

The court also asked the government to show cause why it should not be directed to pay compensation to the detainees, and asked it to provide necessary medical facilities for them.

A division bench comprising Justice Hamidul Huq and Justice Salma Masud Chowdhury issued the rule, returnable in a week, upon writ petitions challenging the detention.

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Holiday

The offices of *The Daily Star* will remain closed today (Monday) on the occasion of the Victory Day.

Therefore, there will be no issue of the newspaper tomorrow (Tuesday).



PHOTO: STAR

Bangladesh cricket coach Mohsin Kamal offers a few tips-off to Mohammad Ashraf during yesterday's practice session at the MA Aziz Stadium in Chittagong ahead of the second Test against the West Indies, which begins today.