

Transit, duty-free access remain unresolved

JEC meet ends with decision to start Dhaka-Agartala bus service in August; FTA to be talked in mid-October

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The India-Bangladesh Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting ended here yesterday without much headway in duty-free access of products to India and transit -- two main demands by Dhaka and New Delhi.

The meeting also pushed back the issue of free trade agreement (FTA) to mid-October when the two sides will resume dialogues. Dhaka's demand for free access of 180 products will also be reviewed then -- a shift from the previous night's decision that India would take home the list and review it.

However, the two next-door neighbours decided to start bus service between Dhaka and Agartala in the first week of August, the second such route after Dhaka-Kolkata bus service opened in April 1999.

Dhaka also did not agree to New Delhi's demand for transit or transshipment facilities to transport

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Indian External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha makes a gesture as Foreign Minister M. Morshed Khan looks on during a joint press conference yesterday at the end of the Joint Economic Commission meeting.

PHOTO: STAR

Business leaders, economist sceptic about meet

STAR REPORT

Top chamber leaders and economists are sceptic about the outcome of the three-day Joint Economic Commission (JEC) meeting and said that India should take measures in building Bangladesh's confidence to give such talks positive results.

The Presidents of Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI) and Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industry (MCCI) said the meeting failed to address the non-tariff barriers and trade gap due to non-cooperation from the Indian side.

They urged the Indian government to show a goodwill gesture by eliminating non-tariff barriers on Bangladesh exporting items and effective measures to reduce the trade deficit before signing a free trade agreement (FTA) with Bangladesh.

"India always promises but seldom implements the commitment, which is deterrent to bilateral cooperation," Tapan Chowdhury, MCCI president, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said the issues of transit and transshipment should not have been discussed in the JEC meeting. Terming those issues purely political,

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5 killed, fresh areas flooded in 6 dists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Floodwaters killed five people and submerged fresh lowlands in six districts yesterday, forcing people to shift to higher ground leaving behind their homes or stranding them in swamped homes.

Two died in a flood-swollen field in Nimaichara village in Pabna district and three of diarrhoea in Gaibandha district.

The flooding spread to new areas in central Manikganj and northern Pabna, Sirajganj, Gaibandha, Bogra and Natore districts.

The floods, triggered by torrential monsoon rains and cascading

down rivers swollen by rain waters in the upstream, played havoc with Manikganj district.

According to the local administration, 2,00,000 people were stranded in their submerged villages and 41,377 houses, 843 kilometres of roads, 24 embankments and 49 bridges and culverts were damaged in floodwaters. Crop damage was also reported on 1,00,000 acres.

In Gaibandha, the fierce-flowing Karotoa burst its bank at Khalshi and inundated hundreds of villages in Talukh Kanupur, Dharbasta, Sapmara, Gomaniganj, Nakaihat, Harirampur, Rakhulpur

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Unocal to develop Moulvibazar gas field

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

US-based company Unocal got Petrobangla's nod last week to develop the Moulvibazar gas field located in Block 13.

The \$43 million project includes drilling of two new production wells, construction of a gas processing plant and installation of a 20-kilometre long 16 inch-diameter pipeline to link up the gas field with Petrobangla's North-South Pipeline.

A Gas Purchase and Sale

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Amini rejects JS body chairmanship in a huff

SHAKHAWAT LITON

Two weeks after the ruling coalition leader Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) pacified the Islamic Oikya Jote (IOJ), its minor partner has now turned down the chairmanship of a parliamentary body

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Govt meets today to get ready for worse

REZAUL KARIM

A relentless spell of floods in 23 districts has prompted the inter-ministerial Disaster Management Coordination Committee to hold a meeting today to discuss the overall situation and preparedness for the worse.

Officials said the meeting to be

attended by 22 secretaries, directors general, senior engineers and other officials was called, as major rivers burst their banks swamping fresh areas. Disaster Management and Relief Minister Chowdhury Kamal Ibne Yusuf will chair the meeting starting at 11:30am.

The fear of floods became closer,

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Hit-and-run case buried in cop apathy

The Daily Star reporter finds identity of driver who dragged doctor to death while cops fail

MORSHED ALI KHAN

The driver who trailed a doctor to his death on July 1 works for Multimode Group at the Anchor Tower at 1/1B Sonargaon Road and has been absconding ever since, The Daily Star found out.

Sujon was at the wheel of the car that knocked down biker Dr Mohammad Shajahan Ali, 40, medical officer of Pongu Hospital, in front of the Sobhanbagh mosque and dragged him nearly one kilometre when his leg got tangled in

the car's extra bumper.

The driver, allegedly a hoodlum in the city's Eskaton area, was driving Director, Administration of the Group Din Mohammad Khan on the day.

A day after the incident, Khan went abroad, the firm sources said.

The Group tried to locate Sujon at his residence after the incident, but did not find him.

The chairman of Multimode Group could not be reached for his comments. His personal assistant,

who identified himself as Sohel, advised The Daily Star to contact the company's legal advisor, Shah Ahmed Badal.

The legal advisor was unable to provide further information about the driver.

The Mohammadpur police, who are investigating the case, have made no progress. The Officer-in-Charge of the station, MA Malek, said after examining the incident

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Shipping deptt chief engineer suspended

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Ministry of Shipping yesterday suspended the chief engineer of the Department of Shipping for negligence of duty.

Chief Engineer Matiur Rahman was suspended and made an officer on special duty (OSD) after he failed to send letters to the owners of passenger vessels declared risky and unfit by an expert committee of the ministry.

The decision to suspend the chief engineer was taken at a meeting between the government and launch owners held at the conference room of the shipping ministry with Minister Akbar Hossain in the chair.

At one stage of the lengthy meeting, the minister came to know that

the office of the chief engineer had not informed the owners of the "risky and unfit" vessels of the decision taken by the ministry.

The chief engineer, who was also present at the meeting, came under fire by the minister, who ordered the secretary of the ministry to suspend him and find out why Matiur Rahman did not issue the letter to the owners of unfit launches.

During the meeting, Akbar also expressed dissatisfaction as a number of important decisions taken about a year ago have not yet been implemented due to negligence of duty by the officials. He also blamed the launch owners for dishonouring various orders of the government.

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Bangabandhu Murder Case left in the lurch

Hearing unlikely before 2005

ZAYADUL AHSAN

The long-drawn Bangabandhu Murder Case is likely to face further delay after the most senior judge of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court was superseded by his junior in the appointment to the Appellate Division.

Had the government followed the line of seniority in appointing the judge, the hearing of the case would have taken place in February 2004.

The government elevated Justice MM Ruhul Amin to the Appellate Division from the High Court Division on Saturday in a step that superseded the most senior judge of the High Court, Justice Syed Amirul Islam.

Retirement dates of the Appellate Division judges show that constitution of the bench to hear the case will not take place before March 2005, as the seniority line has been overstepped.

The petitions to file appeals against the verdict on the historical Bangabandhu Murder Case have remained suspended since August 2001, with the majority of the judges in the Appellate Division having expressed embarrassment to hear them.

Currently, the seven-judge Appellate Division has only one judge, who had not expressed embarrassment, nor did he hear the

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100 washed away in Himachal downpour

AFP, Shimla

At least 100 people were washed away and killed and some 30 injured when a savage downpour lashed a power project in the popular northern Indian resort district of Kulu Wednesday, officials said.

Vir Bhadra Singh, the chief minister of Himachal Pradesh state where Kulu is situated, told journalists that the downpour caused widespread death and destruction in the remote region.

"We have moved some 30 people to hospitals for treatment for the injuries they received and so far we have reports of at least 100 casualties," Singh said in the state capital of Shimla.

Two other people died on the way to hospital, other officials said as Singh rushed a rescue and relief

contingent to Kulu, one of India's most popular health and trekking resorts.

The chief minister said some 230 workers, mostly migrant labourers from India's Bihar state and Nepal, were at the under-construction power facility when they were hit by the downpour.

About 14 labourers of a private firm working on the project were among those washed away in a flash-flood triggered by the rains, they said.

The Press Trust of India said the monsoon skies opened up over Kulu's remote Garsa area where employees were working on the state-funded Parvati hydro-project, one of Asia's largest.

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