

Morshed hopes India trip to improve ties

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday told parliament that he felt his visit to India after assumption of power by the new Congress government would have positive impact on strengthening relations between the two countries.

Replying to a question from Delwar Hossain Sayeedi (Jamaat-Pirojpur), he said the Indian leaders have renewed commitments to work together for economic uplift of both the countries and establishing peace and solidarity in the region.

Replying to a question from May 31 to June 4 as special envoy of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and handed over her letters to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi.

During his visit to India, Morshed Khan said, he held meetings with the new Indian prime minister, his Indian counterpart, other ministers and political leaders and discussed bilateral issues.

During the meetings, Indian leaders had responded positively in resolving various unresolved matters through discussion, he added.

Replying to Mia Golam Farwar (Jamaat), the minister said that during his visit to India, he had discussed bilateral trade and investment, security matters, proposed river-linking mega project by India, and cultural and educational co-operation.

He informed that during the discussions, the Indian leaders had expressed their willingness to strengthen relation with Bangladesh and to resolve all bilateral issues through discussion.

He told MA Hashem (BNP) that Bangladesh had taken an initiative to sign a MoU with the Malaysian government for co-operation in the field of science and technology, and the matter was now under the consideration of the Malaysian government.

With such an agreement, Khan said, the Malaysian public and private entrepreneurs could play a significant role in developing the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector of Bangladesh.

The foreign minister hinted in parliament that the defeat of Salauddin Kader Chowdhury in the OIC (Organisation of Islamic Conference) election was due to negative campaign by the opposition Awami League (AL).

He was replying to a question from Farook Khan (AL-Gopalganj) about the financial loss in contesting the election and the defeat.

Khan told Kader Siddiqui (KSJL) that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs left no stone unturned for the Bangladesh candidature in the OIC election. "We tried heart and soul," he said and hinted that "negative campaign by (AL) was the reason for the defeat."

Replying to Farook Khan, he claimed that the success of Bangladesh foreign policy was the highest in last 32 years.

He told M Sultan Mahmud Babu (BNP) that in the revised budget of fiscal 2003-04, expenses for the Bangladesh missions abroad were over Tk 146.34 crore although the allocation in FY 2002-03 was Tk 135 crore. The excess expenditure for the missions was due to the fall of taka against dollar and euro in the last fiscal year, he said.

Replying to Prof Shahidul Islam (BNP), the minister said Bangladesh peacekeepers are now working in ten countries under the United Nations.

The foreign minister said the country earned \$ 84 million (Tk 504 crore) in FY 2003-04 from those peacekeeping missions. Since its participation in the peacekeeping missions, the country earned about \$ 502 million (Tk 3,000 crore), he added.

Changes in admin

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday transferred five deputy commissioners, freshly appointed seven and made two others OSDs (Officers on Special Duty).

According to an establishment ministry of notification, the five DCs transferred are Yunusur Rahman (from Brahmanbaria to Moulvibazar), Mohammad Harun Chowdhury (from Panchagarh to Sylhet), Shah Alam Bakshi (from Jamalpur to Mymensingh), Ahmed Ullah (from Chapainwabanj to Dinajpur) and Makshumul Hakim Chowdhury (from Thakurgaon to Noakhali).

Mohammad Humayun Kabir, director at the Prime Minister's Office, has been appointed to DC of Jamalpur, Zahirul Haq, deputy secretary at home ministry, to DC of Brahmanbaria, Mohammad Ilias, director of BCS Administration Academy, to DC of Satkhira, Gazi Mizanur Rahman, director at Bangladesh Public Service Training Academy (BPATC), to DC of Thakurgaon, SM Foyzal Alam, director of Muktiyoddaha Kalyan Trust, to DC of Panchagarh and AS Shamim Ahmed, deputy secretary at agriculture ministry to DC of Pabna.

Meanwhile, the jobs of Satkhira DCAYM Ekramul Haq and Narail DC Fapad Uddin have been placed with the establishment ministry for appointment in future.

According to officials, the posts of deputy commissioners fell vacant when 23 officers were promoted as joint secretaries. The government is said to be in crisis of meritorious officers for the posts of DC.

10,000 murdered

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Jatiya Party portrayed a dismal picture of inadequacy of police manpower, transports and fuel and police stations.

BNP lawmaker Ilyas Ali asked for splitting Sylhet Kotwali Police Station into several police stations to cope with the increasing number of crimes.

Azizur Rahman Chowdhury of Jamaat said bus robberies have become rampant on Dhaka-Dinajpur highway.

Shahiduzzaman Beltu of the BNP said his district Jhenidah has turned a crime-prone area and asked for immediate replacement of out-of-operation police vehicles.

AL lawmaker Shahjahan Khan alleged the government has lost control over law and order situation.

Jatiya Party legislator Hafizuddin told the House mugging and toll collection were rampant in Thakurgaon town at night.

In response to a query by Hialuzzaman Talukdar of the BNP, Altas said during the period 1996 till date, 20,797 arms licences were issued. Of these, 4,048 were issued during 2001-2004 and the rest during 1996-2000 when the AL was in power.

"In many cases, we found there was no similarity between the photographs and people given arms licences. Some people were not found in their address, even the under-aged and children were given licences," he said.

Altas told parliament an inquiry into the irregularities was on and that lawful action would be taken.

Arms licences given during AL rule: 1996-793, 1997-4,417, 1998-4,174, 1999-3,959, 2000-3,408 and 2001-3,513. Arms licences given during the present coalition rule: 2002-153, 2003-186 and 2004-194.

26 Iraqis

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AL-Anbar province while conducting security and stability operations," the military said in a statement.

Meanwhile, US soldiers shot dead one Iraqi child and wounded another when the car their father was driving failed to stop at a checkpoint in Baghdad Monday night despite repeated warnings, the US military claimed yesterday.

"US soldiers fired on an Iraqi vehicle that failed to obey verbal and visual warnings to stop near western Baghdad," it said in a statement.

Also yesterday, a group of armed, masked Iraqi men threatened to kill Jordanian militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi if he did not immediately leave the country, accusing him of killing innocent Iraqis and defiling the Muslim religion.

The threats revealed the deep anger many Iraqis feel toward foreign fighters, whom many consider as illegitimate a presence here as the 160,000 troops of the US-led coalition.

In a videotape sent to the al-Arabia television station, a group calling itself the 'Salvation Movement,' questioned how al-Zarqawi could use Islam to justify the killing of innocents, the targeting of government officials and the kidnapping and beheading of foreigners.

"He must leave Iraq immediately, he and his followers and everyone who gives shelter to him and his criminal actions," said a man on the video.

The video marked the first time an Iraqi group made such a public threat against al-Zarqawi, for whom the US troops carried out an air strike on Fallujah Monday killing at least 12 people.

The US warplanes dropped four 500-pound (227-kilogram) bombs and two 1,000-pound bombs against a Mujahedeen safe house, said a US military spokesman.

Observers demand

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free and fair elections, that the results of this contest be nullified and another election be expediently held, otherwise people will lose respect for the entire electoral process."

The demand came two days before the Election Commission's (EC's) hearing of the appeal filed by Bikalpa Dhara Bangladesh (BDB) candidate Abdul Mannan for cancellation of the by-polls at the EC conference room on Thursday.

The EC has already served a notice to both the ruling BNP and the BDB to attend the hearing on the validity of the parliamentary by-election, which has been eclipsed by allegations of massive vote rigging.

The BDB in an appeal to the EC on July 3 demanded the cancellation challenging legality of the election. In his appeal Mannan claimed he had submitted 'evidences' of ballot rigging by the ruling alliance at 89 of the 103 polling centres and a range of other irregularities to back up his demand.

On the four election observer groups' demand to nullify the by-polls results, Acting Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Saifur Rahman told the British Broadcasting Corporation's Bangla Service yesterday. "The matter is sub-judice. I cannot speak on it."

He said, "I don't have the legal authority to cancel the by-election. A petition has been filed by the BDB candidate, both parties have been served with a notice and the EC will reach a decision after hearing both the sides."

This is the first time the observer groups have raised such a demand, as generally they limit their task to praying the poll scenario. But, they said the irregularities in the last occasion went to such an extent that they felt compelled to demand revocation of its results.

The observer groups actually have raised doubts about the total election process, efficacy of election laws and the role of EC, said a Munira Khan, chairperson of Fema.

She told The Daily Star last night, "We don't blame any political party. But, election which is essential to a strong democracy, must not be degraded to such a farce, which gives rise to a notion that election is quite an easy thing, what you need is only to repress your opponent."

"If no one obeys the rules and regulations what is the point of their existence?" she enquired.

"If there are any loopholes in the existing rules and regulations, we would want them reformed," Khan said, adding, "If a 'free and fair election' seal was given to the highly irregular Dhaka-10 by-polls, their future elections might become meaningless."

A former election commissioner told The Daily Star last night, "In the latest election, they [observer groups] have witnessed the government to use state powers under legal cover to forcibly swing the verdict in favour of its candidate, eroding public confidence on the entire election process."

"If such a trend continues it would wear away public confidence in fair polls," he noted.

Earlier, Fema Secretary General Muhammad Abdul Matin had termed the election an unusual event in the history of Bangladesh, a 'one-sided' show, and said dominance of the four-party alliance candidate was keenly felt at almost all the polling stations.

Janipon in a statement had reported that the by-polls was held amid high instances of fraud, fake voting and other electoral interference.

In a written statement, the Janipon had said the parliamentary by-election was marred by high instances of fraud, enough to call into question the validity of its final results.

Not more than 35 percent voters took part in the election, it noted.

According to Brotee's queer vote matrix, the participation of genuine voters was very limited, though the total voter presence was 73 percent. The average vote cast was 38 percent while 35 percent of the voters left without casting vote. And of the 38 percent votes cast, 55 percent were 'false' and the rest, 45 percent, genuine.

DemocracyWatch reported of a very low turnout of voters, especially of women, and maintained there was no incident of violence due to the absolute supremacy of a particular party at every polling centre.

On the election day, the acting CEC had rejected the demand for cancellation of the election, though he told the press, "I can only say the poll was not totally satisfactory."

The EC secretariat had hurriedly published gazette notification on the polls results and Speaker Jamir Uddin Sirar administered the oath of office to ruling coalition candidate Mossadik Ali Falu in a similar fashion, taking less than three hours to complete the process.

Keraniganj

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Kotwali police arrested Omar from old Dhaka three days back and later handed him over to Keraniganj Police Station. Omar Sheikh, now on a two-day remand in Nasir Ali murder case, stands accused in Delwar murder case too.

Mannan sues govt

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irregularities in the by-polls.

He levelled charges of contempt against Prime Minister's Principal Secretary Kamal Uddin Siddiqui, Home Secretary Omar Farooque, Defence Secretary KM Ehsanul Haq and Acting Principal Staff Officer Brigadier General Ilyas Iftakhar Rasul.

Mannan's lawyers expect the High Court bench of Justice Abdul Wahhab Mia and Justice Jinat Ara to hear the case today. The same bench on June 29 ordered the four officials to deploy army in each polling centre on a writ petition by Mannan and three other election candidates.

"(The) Court's order has not been complied with by the respondent-contemners wilfully and deliberately to have an exparte result in favour of the ruling [alliance] candidate and therefore such deliberate and wilful disobedience to the order of this Hon'ble Court and thereupon conduct of such election is wholly illegal," the petition observed while questioning the validity of the polls result.

Slapping charges of massive rigging and manipulation by the ruling BNP-led four-party alliance, Mannan said, "The hoodlums of the ruling party captured the polling stations and snatched away ballot papers from the presiding officers of the... 89 centres at gunpoint and put seal on those in favour of the ruling [alliance] candidate. The agents were not allowed to lodge any complaint with the respective presiding officers. The women polling agents were threatened with gang-rape."

"The respondent-contemners are liable to be prosecuted and punished for contempt of this Hon'ble Court," the petition noted.

Court accepts

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(PBCP-ML) leader Abdur Rashid Shaikh Mias Tapu, has been excluded from the charge sheet as he was killed last month in a crossfire with police after being arrested in Dhaka.

Four of the accused now in jail are Sumon, Ali Akbar, Bomaru Akram and Bulbul.

Khulna police filed two cases, one for murder of the journalist and the other under Explosives Act, on January 19. Charge sheet in the case under Explosives Act was submitted on March 19, accusing 13 people.

Manik Saha, Khulna correspondent of The New Age and a stringer for BBC, was killed in a bomb attack on January 15 this year near Khulna Press Club. The PBCP (Janajuddha) claimed responsibility for the murder.

CID to submit

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Experts of the Home Ministry Monitoring Cell yesterday approved the memorandum of evidence (ME).

"We'll submit the charge sheet after Superintendent of Police and Public Prosecutor of Gazipur approves the memorandum of evidence," Assistant Superintendent Khaleduzzaman, leader of the team, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The CID team hopes to get the approval today.

The slain lawmaker's brother Motiur Rahman lodged the case accusing 17 people of the murder. He named Nurul Islam Sarkar, leader of the ruling party's youth front Jubo Dal as the mastermind.

State Minister for Home Affairs Lutfuzzaman Babar on May 24 ordered the investigation officer to complete the probe immediately and submit the charge sheet in a month.

He also ordered the police to arrest all the FIR named killers.

Police so far have managed to arrest only three accused -- Mahbub, Monir and Dulal.

Dwindling Danish aid not to harm current projects

Envoy tells journalists

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Danish assistance to different development programmes in Bangladesh has shrunk but it would not adversely affect the ongoing development programmes here, said the Danish Ambassador to Bangladesh Niels Severin Munk.

He said this while speaking at Face to Face with Women Journalists, a programme organised by Bangladesh Centre for Development Journalism and Communication (BCDJ) in the city yesterday.

Niels Severin Munk said the Danish financial assistance for various development programmes in Bangladesh has been cut to 200 million Danish Kroner from the previous year's allocation of 230 million Kroner.

He dismissed suggestions that Bangladesh being listed as the most corrupt country by the Transparency International has something to do with the reduction in financial allocation to Bangladesh. He, however, said as a development partner, the Danish government would always like to ensure that their money is better used without any hindrance stemmed from corruption.

An aide to the ambassador explaining the reasons for reduction in the allocation said that Denmark did not intend the reduction in aid for any specific reason. The assistance has decreased rather as a part of its global policy to gradually reduce the foreign aid.

The aide also said programmes that are aimed at reducing poverty in Bangladesh would not be affected by the cut.

"We have noticed tremendous improvement in the agriculture sector and areas relating to women empowerment. Remarkable achievements in these two sectors are really praiseworthy," said the ambassador.

The ambassador said DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency) funded various development programmes including water and sanitation, arsenic mitigation, rehabilitation of women, elimination of violence against women, childcare and human development and empowerment of adolescent girls.

Loan defaulter arrested

UNB, Dhaka

A loan defaulter was arrested on a court warrant on Monday night for non-repayment of loan of Tk 2 crore to Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited.

Motijheel police arrested the businessman, Habibur Rahman Mollah, at his Dhanmondi residence and produced him in the court yesterday.

No pay

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regard as they are unable to pay salary as the funds come from the finance ministry," Jahan Ara said on Thursday.

Meanwhile, the government has taken up a programme to recruit an additional 35,000 primary teachers under the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II) involving an outlay of about Tk 5,000 crore for expansion and qualitative improvement of primary education.

The education ministry has received the highest allocation of Tk 7,680 crore in the budget for fiscal 2004-05 against Tk 6,740 crore in the 2003-04 budget.

BTRC

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Telecom Limited -- qualified for one licence each. QC Telecom, which belongs to a policy-maker, had received approval for another licence earlier in the first round.

In the first round, the BTRC had approved 10 licences for fixed phone networks. Of them eight licences have already been issued to four companies -- four licences to Bashundhara Communications Network Limited, two to Ranks Telecom Limited, a venture of Ranks Group, and one each to Jalalabad Telecom Limited and Bangla Phone, a joint venture of Nitol Group, Technoheaven Co Ltd and Bengal Communications International Inc.

Of the remaining two, Westec Limited, a project of an internet service provider, has deposited the licence fee while QC Telecom Ltd has not done so yet, BTRC officials said.

Agro-based

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international market," Finance Minister Saifur Rahman told the press yesterday. "That is why we are planning to subsidise agro-based product exports."

"We have declared this fiscal year as the agriculture year. The Youth Development Directorate will make a list of persons who have been given training in agro-based industry," he added. "According to that list, they will get loans from banks for setting up agro-based industries."

DB men rescue businessman

Foil scheme to cheat Tk 10 lakh, nab four frauds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives on Monday frustrated a scheme of four swindlers to cheat Tk 10 lakh out of a businessman.

The Detective Branch (DB) plainclothesmen rescued the businessman named Mohammad Rezaul Karim, recovered and returned the money to him and arrested the frauds posing as NGO workers at a four-floor office in the city's Uttara Model Town.

Karim owns six-bigha (each bigha equals to 33 decimals) of land at Arahajar in Narayanganj. The gang in the name of Poor Development Forum, an imaginary non-governmental organisation, contacted Karim and expressed their willingness to rent 18,000 square feet of floor space from him.

Karim had 2,000 square feet under a tin shed on his plot. The cheats requested him to build additional structures on some 15,000 square feet of land, for which they said he would receive an advance of Tk 50 lakh.

The gang told Karim Poor Development Forum was a well to do foreign NGO willing to invest in the country, and in exchange of the lucrative deal the four men asked a commission of Tk 10 lakh to be paid in advance. Karim accepted the proposal readily and 'in good heart'.

As per their agreement, Karim in the early morning Monday left his 2/F Abhyoy Lane house with Tk 10 lakh and headed for Poor Development office at Road 30, House 9, Sector 4, Uttara. He reached the fourth floor of the five-storey building at around 8:00am.

Upon receiving the Tk 10-lakh as commission, the gang gave four bundles of notes, apparently all in 500 taka notes, to Karim, claiming to have paid Tk 20 lakh and assuring to pay the rest on the following day.

But, the bundles were of 10-taka notes with 500-taka notes glued on the top and the bottom to make them look like bundles of Tk five lakh each. Not knowing that he was being conned, Karim refused to continue with the deal for only Tk 20 lakh.

As soon as Karim demanded his money back, the gang threatened to kill him if he did not leave the office at once.

Minutes later, somebody knocked on the door, which made the cheats terrified. When they were persuaded to open the door, the DB men got inside and arrested Saiful Islam, Chinu Mia, Shamsul Haq and Shahjahan.

They were arrested and taken to the DB office at Minto Road. DB police later said they raided the office on a tip-off, but refrained from saying who did the warning.

CJs should have no

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brought through consultation with and consensus among the political parties to ensure what he said was a "check and balance" in the caretaker government.

"It requires some thinking about what should be the check and balance," he added.

The daylong hearing on the petition took place in the larger bench of Justice Jaiul Abedin, Justice Awlad Ali and Justice Mirza Hossain Haider.

Supreme Court Advocate M Salimullah filed the writ petition in January 25, 2000 and the court asked the government why the 13th amendment should not be declared unconstitutional.

The petitioner said the amendment suspends the constitution's preamble and articles 8, 48 and 56 during caretaker government's rule. It has also given rise to an unhealthy trend in the appointments to the judiciary, as the ruling party tends to manipulate the appointments of the chief justice on the basis of their political allegiance.

The petitioner's counsel, MI Farooqui, told the court, "Soon after the 13th amendment, the election was held under a caretaker government headed by former chief justice Habibur Rahman. When the BNP lost the election, its chief, Khaleda Zia brought allegations of rigging."

"Then in the next phase, [former chief justice] Latifur Rahman was made the caretaker government chief. When Rahman shuffled some high officials within hours of his assumption of power, the Awami League termed it a civil coup and it termed him a betrayer after losing the election."

Farooqui argued, "Latifur Rahman defended the shuffling of high officials, saying that he had done his homework before taking office, giving the impression that his executive mind was working before his assumption of office."

"This proves that the prospect of becoming caretaker government chief affects and lures the prospective chief justices."

"The criteria for immediate past chief justice appears to be very innocent, it gives an impression that there is no scope of picking and choosing, but when two chief justices retire within a very short period in the end of their tenure, the government chooses the time of its resignation keeping an eye upon the loyalty of the two judges."

He added the recent 14th amendment increased the service age of Supreme Court judges, which was done apparently to make a particular former chief justice the next caretaker chief.

Farooqui also referred to the complaints by the Supreme Court Bar Association about politicisation of the judges' appointment.

Ruhul Kuddus Babu aided Farooqui, while Additional Attorney General Fida M Kamal made a brief submission for the government.

UN warns Asia

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improving, it falls well short of what is needed, the report said.

Prevention work is also failing for those on the margins of society who need it most -- notably homosexuals, migrants and drug users -- who are systematically ignored in some of Asia's most conservative societies.

Women, who account for 28 percent of all infections in the region, also face particular difficulties in parts of Asia where seeking birth control or treatment can result in social alienation.

Bangla Bhai

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The major opposition AL and the I-party have called the rally in Bhabaniganj college field this morning to protest the JMB atrocities and demand immediate arrest of its dreaded operations commander Bangla Bhai. AL Publicity Secretary Asaduzzaman Noor MP, Presidium Member Mohiuddin Khan and Workers Party Polit Bureau Member Fazle Hossain Badsha are likely to address the meeting.

From the grand rally, the leaders are expected to announce committees to resist terrorist and communal activities. The committees will be formed at village and upazila levels with professionals and political leaders with a view to resist both the communist outlaws and the JMB cadres, who for long have been oppressing the people in the north-western region, sources said.

Initially, the organisation arranging public security will be formed at Bagmara and will later be extended to Puthia, Naldanga, Durgapur, Raniganj and Atrai upazilas, said a senior leftist politician.

"Partisan role of police has forced us to prepare an outline for anti-terrorism organisation at villages, as people have the right to protect themselves," he said when asked if the organisation would create more tension.

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