

Dhaka proposes 2 bodies

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Talking to reporters after the meeting with Aiyar at the Secretariat, Finance Minister M Saifur Rahman said trade and tri-nation gas pipeline issues can be discussed separately. It is not right to link them.

Adviser to the Energy Ministry Mahmudur Rahman however toed a different line, linking the issues of trade imbalance, corridor through India and import of electricity from Nepal and Bhutan to the pipeline issue.

Aiyar later sounded very positive about the outcome of the meeting with Saifur, saying he would report it to the Indian government. When Dhaka officially approves the outcome, he hopes "to come back very soon to sign the (pipeline) agreement among India, Bangladesh and Myanmar," he added.

Aiyar, who arrived in Dhaka yesterday morning on a two-day official visit, earlier held meetings with the prime minister, foreign minister and energy adviser.

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan had briefed the finance minister about the three meetings.

Saifur told journalists that trade-related issues should not be discussed with the gas pipeline issue. Trade issues should be discussed by the commerce ministers of India and Bangladesh as they involve a lot of complicated matters like rules of origin.

On trade imbalance, Saifur pointed out that Bangladesh has trade gap not only with India but also with China and Singapore. "Agreements alone will not increase our export to India. If our goods are cost effective, India will not be able to bar them from entering its market," he said.

The finance minister however said the corridor issue and import of electricity from Bhutan and Nepal can be discussed with the tri-nation pipeline issue as a package deal.

Saifur also asked the Indian minister to immediately initiate the process of setting up the pipeline, saying even if talks start now, it will take at least two and a half years to start the work.

He also mentioned the lack of sincerity both in India and Bangladesh concerning the gas pipeline. "The problem with both Bangladesh and India is we talk more and work less."

Asked about Bangladesh's benefits from the tri-nation pipeline, Aiyar said Bangladesh will be able to take its gas from its north-eastern part to the areas around Jessore where Bangladesh has petrochemical plants.

Aiyar also talked positively about Bangladesh's demand for transit with Nepal. "A commitment in this regard has already been achieved in January this year."

AIYAR-MAHMUDUR MEET
Energy Ministry Adviser Mahmudur and Indian Minister Aiyar at a meeting between them discussed the much-talked-about \$1 billion gas pipeline issue.

Both of them, however, stuck to their previous stances during the discussion.

Sources said Mahmudur informed Aiyar Bangladesh has agreed in principle to allow its territory for the pipeline, providing that India would have to consider the issues of trade imbalance and corridor to and electricity from Nepal and Bhutan.

However, Aiyar objected to bilateral issues being linked to the pipeline project.

Aiyar after the meeting told reporters he held the meeting with Mahmudur with 'considerable satisfaction'.

"We've had very constructive dialogue, which I think has opened the path to the resolution of the few remaining issues..." he said.

Mahmudur said the Indian minister has supported the three issues but opposed linking these to the pipeline project.

"We have pointed out our stance on the issues and said they are very much important for our economy" he told reporters after the meeting.

The energy adviser said he believes the level of confidence between the two sides has increased through the talks.

Mahmudur said the Indian minister's visit is a courtesy one and he wants to know his government's stance. "The goal of the courtesy visit has been fulfilled hundred percent"

He expressed the hope the differences between the two countries on the pipeline issue will be reduced in a considerable time.

The three countries agreed in principle to construct the pipeline on the basis of the proposal of Mohona Holding Ltd., a Bangladeshi firm, at the Rangson meet of the energy ministers in January.

However, the project has not witnessed much progress due to pre-conditions set by Bangladesh for allowing passage through its territory.

India feels Dhaka should be happy with an annual transit fee of \$125 million, but Bangladesh does not see it as a fair deal.

If the pipeline is laid through Bangladesh to West Bengal – as it was originally planned – it will be 900km long and cost around Rs450 million. If it is laid through the north-east bypassing Bangladesh, it will be 500km longer.

India is predicted to require 400 million standard cubic meters of gas everyday by 2025, up from current 90 million standard cubic meters.

AIYAR-MORSHED MEET
During the meeting Morshed and Aiyar agreed to take up confidence building measures to carry forward the existing relations between the two countries.

Emerging from the meeting, Aiyar said, "My impression is that things are moving forward."

Briefing reporters, Foreign

Secretary Hemayetuddin said Aiyar's visit was not centred on any particular issue and Bangladesh is happy with his visit. Aiyar is an influential minister and a senior politician, he added.

Aiyar's visit following the tour by Indian External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh last month is very important to the Indo-Bangladesh relations, he said. Aiyar came to Bangladesh at the invitation of the foreign minister, he added.

Turning to the meeting between Aiyar and the foreign minister, Hemayetuddin said they discussed a wide range of bilateral issues including expansion of trade, sharing of common rivers, water issues, and tri-lateral cooperation in gas pipeline.

"There was no in depth discussions...it was a general discussion between the two ministers."

"They discussed all issues of bilateral cooperation and agreed to take appropriate steps to strengthen relations of the two countries."

When asked about the tri-nation gas pipeline, Hemayetuddin said Aiyar briefed the foreign minister about Indian plans to set up the gas pipeline and informed about several options regarding transport of gas from Myanmar.

The options include pipeline through Bangladesh, pipeline through deep-sea of Bay and transportation of gas from Myanmar through Bangladesh by converting it into liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), he added.

The foreign secretary said foreign minister listened to the Indian views on the issue and they exchanged views about the benefits of the gas pipeline to the two sides.

Replying to a question regarding the satisfaction of the ministers with the talks, he said "If the two ministers express satisfaction, it is obvious that they are satisfied."

"There were certain issues (relating to gas pipeline) that needed to be clarified or sorted out, and I think there has been some progress on that," he added.

On a query about Aiyar's meeting with the prime minister, the foreign secretary said all bilateral issues were discussed in a cordial atmosphere. He said the prime minister is looking forward to have bilateral meeting with Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh on the sidelines of the 13th Saarc summit here in November.

"We believe that the meeting between the two prime ministers would positively contribute to our bilateral relations," he said. Aiyar's visit is timely, particularly in the wake of the recent visit to Dhaka by Natwar Singh, he added.

In reply to a question Hemayetuddin said the Indo-Bangladesh JRC meeting would be held in Dhaka on September 19-20 as Indian Water Resources Minister Priyar Ranjan Das Munshi is expected to arrive here on September 18.

Talking to foreign office correspondents after the meeting with Morshed Khan, Aiyar said, "I also wish to state that there are other areas of cooperation in the Hydrocarbon sector."

Answering a question, he said the views have been expressed categorically in the tri-lateral press statement issued from Yangon. The statement appreciated the high importance of the pipeline to energy security and economic development of the entire region.

The Indian minister arrived in Dhaka early yesterday morning on a British Airways flight from London.

On arrival at the airport, he told the press that Bangladesh has the potential to contribute in creating energy security in the Indian sub-continent. "The region is looking to creating energy security and Bangladesh has the energy potential," he said.

Foreign Ministry Advisor Reaz Rahman, Foreign Secretary Hemayetuddin and Veena Sikri Indian high commissioner in Dhaka and other high officials from Indian petroleum ministry were present during the meeting.

11 die in DR Congo plane crash

AFP, Kinshasa

Eleven people were killed yesterday when an Antonov 26 freight aircraft struck a tree near Isiro airport in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), aviation officials said.

The death toll of 11, issued by the national aviation authority (RVA), was higher than a provisional figure of seven given by local officials and the UN-funded Okapi radio.

"The accident has caused 11 deaths -- seven passengers, three Russian crew members and an escort, a member of the company that owned the aircraft," RVA director Emmanuel Mokoko told AFP.

Deputy governor of Orientale province, Autσαι Asenga Medard, earlier said the Antonov, owned by private airline Galaxie, caught fire after apparently hitting a tree as it came in to land at about 0630 GMT.

"The weather was very bad at Isiro and that may be one of the reasons for the accident," Medard told AFP by telephone from the provincial centre, Kisangani.

The plane crashed 1.5 kilometres (about a mile) short of the runway after flying from Beni, a town in eastern Nord-Kivu province, Okapi radio reported.

Britain considers forced marriage ban

AFP, London

The British government said yesterday it was considering making forced marriage a criminal offence as it deals with hundreds of cases, mostly relating to people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin.

Ministers stressed the government had not decided whether to proceed and a consultation document acknowledged a change in the law could backfire by scaring many more youngsters away from bringing charges against their parents.

"Many victims are reluctant to see their families get into trouble," the document said.

Most of the cases concerned people of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin but there were others in Britain with ties around the world who were being forced into marriage by their families.

Though the number of forced marriages may be far higher, the government's Forced Marriages Unit has dealt with 1,000 cases brought forward by unhappy spouses since it started work in 2000 and has seen 75 repatriations.

"Forced marriage is marriage without freely given consent," said Home Office minister Baroness Patricia Scotland.

"It is an abuse of human rights and a form of domestic violence. Every major world religion condemns it."

Red alert

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"We have seized many documents which make us sure about his connection with the Islamist militants both at home and abroad," said Zahur Chowdhury, assistant commissioner (Detective Branch) of Khulna Metropolitan Police (KMP).

"It is an abuse of human rights and a form of domestic violence. Every major world religion condemns it."

The recovered documents suggest that he (Masud) has always maintained close links to militant groups based in countries like the US and Japan, he added.

Besides, he took part in the Afghan war along with many others from Bangladesh.

Masud has disclosed names of his three main associates who had been militarily trained in Afghanistan. They are Moulana Rezaul Karim of Digholla upazila of Khulna, Syed Ashraf Ali of Batiaghata upazila, and Mohammad Lokman Shaikh of Rupsha upazila of Khulna district.

"Lokman was part of the plan to plant bombs in Kotalipara in Gopalganj, where former prime minister Sheikh Hasina was supposed to address a rally," Zahur Chowdhury quoted Masud as saying.

The arrested homeopath also disclosed to the DB police names of a number of people who he said detonated bombs at 13 points across Khulna city on August 17. The bombs used were brought from India through Sathkhira border and kept stored inside an Ahle Hadith mosque at Dumuria upazila.

Besides, he linked to the planning of the blasts some leaders of a fundamentalist political outfit that operate overtly.

Earlier Masud was described as a dangerous element for the society by some Islamist extremists arrested recently in Chittagong, said AC Zahur.

Our Staff correspondent from Chittagong reports: Intelligence personnel believe that users of the seized cell phones must be leaders of JMB and Jagrata Muslim Janata Bangladesh (JMJB).

The identification of those cell phone subscribers would lead to the masterminds behind the serial blasts, said the sources in joint Interrogation Cell (JIC) in Chittagong. Arshadul Alam during interrogation in JIC custody yesterday admitted that the top brass of JMB used over 150 mobile phones on August 17 to co-ordinate the near-simultaneous blasts.

The investigators retrieved the numbers from Arshadul's mobile phone, which became non-functional immediately after the blast incidents.

Sources in the JIC said that they are now convinced that the cadres and field-level workers of JMB had carried out the blasts.

The field level workers of the militant group think they have no right to know the identities of the persons at the top level of the organisation, sources said.

If anyone from the lower level happens to know the identity of those at the upper level he must be disciplined and face punishments like gauging out of eyes, the source added.

The five suspects now on seven-day remand seem to know little about the people at the top echelons of the outfit, said the investigators.

Meanwhile, sources said that a team of intelligence men was now in Dhaka to track down the person who had sent TK 1 lakh 45 thousand to Arshadul's account with Islami Bank's Agrabad branch before the blasts. The money was sent from the Motijheel branch of the same bank.

Our Sathkhira correspondent reports: A court here yesterday placed on remand Anisur Rahman Khokon, Monwar Hossain Ujjal, and Indian national Gias Uddin. The three who were arrested for suspected links to the blasts were taken on a seven-day remand each.

They were sent to Dhaka to face grilling by the JIC.

Meanwhile, a Naogaon court yesterday sent to jail the two Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) members arrested in connection with the August 17 explosions, after police produced them before the court on completion of seven days' remand, reports UNB.

The two Abu Kalam Azad, 45, and Moulana Abdul Majid, 35.

Police said the arrestees while on remand have given important information about the cross-country bombings.

Aiyar seeks Hasina's

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tance," he told the reporters after his meeting with Sheikh Hasina at her Sudha Sadan residence in the evening.

During the hour-long meeting, the Indian minister conveyed greetings to Sheikh Hasina on behalf of Sonia Gandhi. "There were deep family relations between the Gandhi family and the Sheikh family," he said.

"I also exchanged very old memories with the opposition leader," Aiyar said mentioning that it was his first ever opportunity to meet Hasina in Bangladesh.

He recalled that he was the desk officer for Economic Affairs in the Indian Foreign Ministry in 1971 and coincidentally he was posted in Brussels when Sheikh Hasina and Sheikh Rehana were also staying there in August 1975.

About the tri-nation gas pipeline, Awami League (AL) General Secretary Abdul Jalil quoted party chief Sheikh Hasina as saying: "We will support anything that is good for the country and the nation. Awami League is devoted to the welfare of the people and the country."

Indian High Commissioner Veena Sikri and Awami League leaders Saber Hossain Chowdhury

Four killed

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hours yesterday. He was pronounced dead on arrival at the DMCH.

In Gulistan, a speeding vehicle ran over an unidentified woman of about 50 near the roundabout at around 4:00am. A passer-by took her to the DMCH where she died soon after her admission.

Tarique rebuts BBC

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"I didn't make any sort of admission nor did I name any international terrorist group to be involved in the August 17 blasts," Tarique told a press briefing at Hawa Bhaban.

BBC Bangla Service on Sunday night aired Tarique's interview on the countryside explosions, saying "Tarique suspects international terrorist organisations like al Qaeda might have carried out the August 17 blasts with the connivance of some misled people of the country."

Tarique said the presenter in London has made a mistake while he [presented] in the intro to the interview said. "This is for the first time that a top leader of the ruling alliance has admitted the presence of international terrorist group inside the country."

"And the BBC has admitted its mistake," Tarique, son of Prime Minister Khaleda Zia and late president Ziaur Rahman, said reading out a statement.

"I want to make it clear that I didn't admit or deny anything," he said, clarifying his views on possible presence of cross-border militant groups in Bangladesh.

"This is not possible for anyone to say clearly who were involved in the attack when the investigation is still on. And that is why in response to the interviewer's question I only said 'it may be', which means I don't know," he said.

"I mentioned the word 'international' in a sense that not only Bangladesh, other countries too are being victims of terrorist attacks," he said.

Acting editor of the BBC Bangla Service Masud Hasan Khan yesterday said, "Tarique Rahman in his interview didn't mention name of any international terrorist organisation."

JS session

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adjournment of the other business of the House, sources in the ruling party said referring to the discussion on the August 21 grenade attacks on an Awami League (AL) rally last year.

The Business Advisory Committee will take the decision prior to beginning the session on Thursday.

Immediately after the August 17 serial bomb blasts, different professional bodies and civil society representatives demanded summoning a special parliament session to hold discussion on it, but the government did not respond.

Several lawmakers however hinted that the law and order situation after the August 17 bomb blast might dominate the upcoming parliament session slated for September 8, as the state minister for home affairs is scheduled to respond to lawmakers' queries at the first sitting of the session.

Lawmakers of AL, the main opposition, and Jatiya Party have demanded holding discussion on August 17 countryside serial bomb blasts and other burning issues in the upcoming parliament session adjourning other business of the House.

They submitted 22 notices at the parliament secretariat demanding discussion on August 17 bomb blasts, price hike of fuel and essentials, law and order situation, Tengratila gas field blow-out etc.

The main opposition that started boycotting parliament last year protesting the speaker's refusal to hold discussion on August 21 carnage adjourning other business of the House has not yet decided whether they will join this session.

"We are not against joining the parliament session. But the way the government is running the parliament has forced the opposition lawmakers to stay outside. No

and Shohel Taj MP were present during the meeting.

Top outlaw

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and five SIMs. **BACKGROUND** Shoab was accused of about 100 criminal offences including 25 murders in cases filed with different southwestern police stations.

Besides, he reportedly had direct involvement in the murders of journalists Manik Chandra Saha, Humayun Kabir Balu, Awami League leaders Manjurul Imam, mayoral candidate SMA Rab, Haroon Sarder, Khulna University treasurer and district AL vice president Abdur Razzak Sarder, three UP chairmen, SI Farhad of Fakhirhat Police Station in Bagerhat and hawilder Akram Hossain of Boyra Police Lines.

A think-tank of the BCP faction, Shoab had claimed responsibility for all the murders using his code name Ripon Ahmed in fax messages.

He was also involved in extortion, robberies, rape and abduction for ransom in the southwestern zone.

He came to limelight after snatching BCP founder Abdur Rashid Malitha alias Tapan from police on Khulna Judge's Court premises on January 26, 2002.

A close relative of Jamaat leader Delwar Hossain Saidee MP, Shoab is the second son of prominent religious leader Moulana Abdul Wahab alias Bulbul-e-Bangladesh of Sonadanga in the city, police sources said.

He was hiding in Uttara in the capital for long to escape arrest.

tion."

"Asked whether international terrorist organisations like al Qaeda's may have links to the August 17 blasts, he [Tarique] replied that they might have," Masud said in the BBC Bangla Service's evening-time bulletin yesterday.

He said in Sunday's night-time bulletin, BBC had corrected its mistake in the interview by saying that Tarique Rahman 'suspects' instead of 'admits' regarding the possible presence of any international terrorist organisation in Bangladesh.

He also said when BBC had questioned Tarique whether he thought al Qaeda or any other militant organisation was involved in the blasts, he replied saying, "it might be".

Nurses stage

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a strike and held agitation inside the hospital. As a result, medical services were disrupted causing immense distress to the patients.

The standstill was resolved when hospital superintendent Dr. Syed Sigbat Ullah assured the staffs of proper action in this regard. After this they called off the strike and got back to their duties around 3:00pm.

They however gave a 72-hour ultimatum to the hospital superintendent to bring the culprits to justice, otherwise they will go for tougher actions.

Nurunahar filed a case in this regard with the Narayanganj police accusing the agent, Halima and two of her associates, Nasima and Dolna.

Moudud

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that his all activities would be made public, he would avoid corruption and partisanship." Anam said, adding that freedom of information is also necessary for the government to know how and where its money was spent.

Economist Atiur Rahman suggested the formation of a civil society platform to establish the people's right to information, which is necessary for saving the lives of the people.

He observed that many countries have already enacted a law ensuring the right to information of the people. But Bangladesh is much behind in this regard.

Shawkat Mahmud said, "There are many barriers in our country in the context of free flow of information. The mindset of the government officials should be changed in this regard."

Aiyar meets

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part Manmohan Singh and hoped that she would see the Indian Premier at the 13th Saarc Summit in Dhaka in November.

Aiyar renewed the Indian prime minister's invitation to Khaleda Zia for a bilateral visit to India and hoped that the visit would take place "soon".

Prime Minister's principal secretary, foreign secretary and Indian high commissioner in Dhaka were also present.

Bangladeshis

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ladeshi students live in New Orleans, the most severely affected city. They left the area before Katrina hit New Orleans.

Director General of the External Publicity Wing (DGEPI) Zahurul Haque said that one medical doctor named Dr Hayder who was on call at the time of hurricane got stuck for over three days until he was rescued. "He is also fine."

Haque said there are three Bangladeshi families in Biloxi (Mississippi), another coastal city ravaged by the calamity. These storm-tossed families are now staying with their friends in adjacent states.

"We have been able to ascertain the whereabouts of two others--Dr Warisur Rahman and Dr Rana. Their houses have been completely destroyed by the hurricane," Haque said.

He said in Mobil (Alabama), some 40 Bangladeshis live and all of them quit the area before the hurricane hit and have now returned to their houses. No casualty has been reported from Mobil.

Haque said according to Prof Kabir Hasan of the University of New Orleans, most houses owned by Bangladeshi-Americans, including his own, were severely damaged. He, however, did not appear concerned as these houses are insured.

Dr Anwarul Haque of Birmingham (Alabama) informed the Bangladesh mission in Washington that the Bangladeshi-American professionals would easily get over the economic loss inflicted by the hurricane but it might cause problem for the ordinary workers as some 250,000 jobs have been lost due to this disaster.

"So far, we have no news of any Bangladeshi casualty. However, it is still too early to say anything definitely as the situation is evolving gradually. We are, however, monitoring the situation closely," the spokesman said.

Ctg-Cox's Bazar

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Presently, it consumes about 150 megabytes of bandwidth.

The purchase committee also approved a Tk 25.49-crore digital telephone installation project to be implemented in Chittagong, Khulna and Sylhet divisions. National Constructions Ltd, a local company, has won the contract for the project to be funded by the South Korean government.

Besides, the committee approved an additional cost of 1 million euros for the Chittagong Wasa Madhuraht Water Treatment Plant project. The contract for this project was awarded to Italian company Tesp in 2001, but the company has since been arguing for an increase in the project cost by 1 million euros.

The committee also approved appointment of a consultant for design and supervision of the Asian Development Bank-funded Emergency Damage Rehabilitation Assistance Project 2004. The consultant will be hired at a cost of \$13.5 million.

AC trains

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The project will be implemented with the government's own resources.

Speaking on the occasion, Nazmul Huda said the government is implementing 29 projects to modernise the railway sector, recognising it as a "thrust sector".

To implement the projects, the government is procuring locomotives, carriages, wagons and tank wagons, modernising old railway stations in the country's eastern and western zones, rehabilitating the railway's main lines and branch lines, and introducing computerised railway signaling system, the minister said.

2 UK soldiers, 14 Iraqis

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continued to battle insurgents in the restive northern town of Tal Afar, where at least 13 rebels were killed Sunday, the US military said.

The casualties included seven rebels killed by helicopter fire after opening up on the forces from inside a mosque.

"Terrorists operating from within a mosque... engaged Iraqi and coalition troops... (who) were unable to suppress the barrage of machine gun and RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) fire and so they requested the assistance of coalition helicopters," a military statement said.

The helicopters returned fire on the mosque "immediately stopping the enemy salvo", the statement said