

PM starts 'new phase

FROM PAGE 1
warmly by Indian Minister of State for External Affairs E Ahmed and Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran at Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport.

After a ceremonial reception at the forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan here today, Khaleda will have talks with her Indian counterpart Dr Manmohan Singh. Delegation-level discussions slated to be held in the evening will be rounded off with signing of agreements.

The two countries are likely to sign three pacts. One will deal with the ways to tackle narcotics smuggling while the other two will be double taxation avoidance and investment protection agreements.

During the talks with Khaleda, Dr Singh is likely to seek Dhaka's cooperation in ending terrorism emanating from Bangladesh and illegal immigration.

Accompanied by a high-level delegation including Foreign Minister Morshed Khan and Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, the Bangladesh prime minister said the potential for Indo-Bangladesh relations was immense and it would be her desire to discuss with the Indian leaders how to fully realise it.

Both the countries have registered impressive economic and social progress recently, she said, adding however, "Our many problems still remain daunting."

The problem of poverty and deprivation stalks the two countries and these problems can be overcome only through cooperation in an environment of peace and stability, said the Bangladesh prime minister.

She said she would like to utilise the visit to discuss "all issues of relevance to our multi-faceted relations. Equally importantly, it would be my intention to carry forward our sustained engagement in a positive direction so that this other major objective is also realised."

Clean candidates

FROM PAGE 1
Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director of the CPD, read out the names of the group's members at a citizens' dialogue on civil society initiative in accountable development efforts. The CPD in collaboration with The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo organised the dialogue at a city hotel.

Leading economists, business leaders, legal experts, development activists, women entrepreneurs, women activists, scientists, litterateurs, former bureaucrats and members of indigenous community are members of the group.

Former chief of caretaker government Justice Habibur Rahman was the chief guest at the dialogue chaired by Prof Rehman Sobhan.

Grameen Bank Managing Director Dr Muhammad Yunus placed a formula for carrying out a movement to pressurise major political parties to nominate competent and honest candidates in the elections.

Law Minister Moudud Ahmed, eminent jurist Dr Kamal Hossain, political leaders Suranjit Sengupta, Motia Chowdhury, ASM Abdur Rahman, Mushfiqur Rahman and leading personalities in different fields took part in the dialogue.

"The group will prepare a mid-term development vision for Bangladesh for the next 15 years which will be turned into our national manifesto," said Debapriya, who will work as member-secretary of the body.

The citizens' group, Debapriya said, will meet different political parties and civil society organisations, hold exchange of views meetings in different places of the country and create public awareness.

It will also analyse election manifesto of major political parties, hold national policy forum meeting 2006 and go for post-election follow-up activities.

Former chief of the caretaker government Justice Habibur Rahman observed that the government's initiative for electoral reforms caused demand for counter reforms.

He said the government increased the age limit for some constitutional posts and raised the number of election commissioners creating confusion among the people. He, however, hoped that the confusion will be cleared very soon.

Rahman underscored the need for rule of honest and competent people.

He observed lack of good advisers in the government. He hoped that the leading scientists and sociologists will come forward and work for improvement of the situation in the country.

He urged the civil society members to continue their work even if people do not join them in large scale. "Some day you will get a large number of companions in your race."

DISCUSSION

Moudud Ahmed participated in the open discussion at the dialogue, and expressed solidarity with the proposed civil society movement to force political parties to nominate honest and competent people as candidates in the election.

"Please launch the movement so vigorously that we the politicians are compelled to follow your suggestions for putting honest people in the electoral race," the minister said.

An opportunity of dialogue has been created to make the next election free and fair, and all parties should reach a consensus on smooth progress of democratic rule, he noted.

Dr Kamal Hossain urged the civil society members to work together with politicians to keep the election free from black money, muscle power, violence and politicisation.

The Gono Forum president went on, "We will have to work for healthy politics to put an end to the ongoing sick politics in Bangladesh, controlled through muscle power, violence and black money," he said participating in the open discussion.

Noting that she was coming here with "tremendous goodwill" of the people of her country, she said the two countries were close neighbours and their bonds of friendship are deeply rooted in the history.

"Our friendship has over the years, drawn strength from our very intimate economic, social and cultural ties. We are, indeed, keen to further deepen these ties," Khaleda said.

Ahead of her arrival, India unveiled its neighbourhood diplomacy with Finance Minister Chidambaram indicating that India is ready to allow easy access to Bangladeshi goods here, a persistent demand of Dhaka which has been seeking removal of tax barriers for this purpose.

Terming India a bigger economy, he said, "We must be able to absorb their (neighbouring countries) exports. What is the point in calling ourselves a regional economic power if we can't help our neighbours?"

"Bangladesh remains poor. What will happen is more people from Bangladesh will migrate to India. And that is what is happening," Chidambaram said.

Soon after her arrival, E Ahmed had a 30-minute meeting with Khaleda at her super luxury suite at Maurya Sheraton Hotel on Sardar Patel Marg.

Emerging from the meeting, Ahmed said economic cooperation was the main topic of discussion. Later, Lok Sabha Speaker Somnath Chatterjee will call on Khaleda.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India did not hold any formal briefing ahead of the prime minister's three-day state visit.

The Indian external affairs ministry also did not make any formal announcement till yesterday. Usually, VVIP visits are announced at least a couple of weeks in advance.

It announced the visit through its website only a few hours before Khaleda's aircraft touched down the Indira Gandhi International Airport at New Delhi at 3:33pm yesterday.

There was not even any media advisory from the MEA till yesterday.

According to the briefing points by the official spokesperson of the MEA: "Bangladesh prime minister is paying a state visit to India from March 20-22, 2006. The visit may be seen in the context of the policy of sustained and continuous high-level engagement that the Government of India has instituted with Bangladesh."

Bangladesh is a close and friendly neighbour and the visit is a testimony to the importance that both countries attach to bilateral relations, it added.

After a ceremonial reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan at 10:00am, she will go to Rajghat and lay floral wreath at Mahatma Gandhi Memorial.

At 12 noon, she will pay a courtesy call on Indian President APJ Abdul Kalam. Indian Minister for Commerce and Industry Kamal Nath will meet her at her hotel suite at 4:00pm.

Khaleda will then go to 10 Janapath to meet UPA Chairperson Sonia Gandhi at 5:00pm. The two leaders are expected to hold talks for an hour. The Bangladesh premier will also call on the Indian vice president at his secretariat.

At 6:15pm, she will arrive at the Hyderabad House, the venue of the talks between the two prime ministers. Khaleda and Manmohan Singh will have a tête-à-tête at Deccan Suite before the delegation level talks begin.

Dr Singh will host a state banquet in honour of his Bangladesh counterpart after the talks and signing of the deals.

Car-bomb

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"The busting of the module is a big success for the security forces and a blow to the militants," the statement said, adding the rebels were detained while they were actually planting a bomb inside a stolen car.

Kashmir is in the grip of a 16-year-old insurgency against Indian rule that has so far left more than 44,000 people dead by official count.

Delhi hints

FROM PAGE 1
investment protection agreement.

He pointed out that the neighbouring countries like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal are "poorer and smaller" and their only market is really the Indian.

Chidambaram said trade agreements with neighbouring countries are not really free and preferential trade agreements.

Minister of State for External Affairs Anand Sharma said India is a large country and it realises its responsibilities to take all countries of the region along as the nation progresses.

He said India attaches great significance to its relations with neighbours.

Chidambaram said the country is not rushing to sign FTAs or PTAs but inking them on geo-political and economic considerations. The agreements will cause some problems to the Indian industry due to invert duty structure, he said.

Bird flu

FROM PAGE 16
Nations last week revealed the presence of H5N1 in six poultry samples taken from Kabul and Nangarhar.

"It is very likely that the H5 type confirmed in Kunar province is the N1 sub-type since it is confirmed positive in neighbouring Nangarhar... and in Kabul," health ministry advisor Abdullah Fahim told AFP.

UN spokesman Adrian Edwards said it was the first time infected birds had been found in Kunar.

No human cases have been reported yet in Afghanistan, he added.

Afghanistan ordered the slaughter of thousands of chickens after last week's announcement that H5N1 had been detected.

About 85 percent of the Afghan population live in close contact with poultry, officials have said, with most rural families having several chickens in the backyard.

Citizens' group

FROM PAGE 1
University, Samson H Chowdhury, chairman of Square Group, Maj Gen (ret'd) Moinal Hossain Chowdhury, former adviser to the caretaker government, Prof Jamilur Reza Chowdhury, vice chancellor of Brac University, Syed Manzoor Elahi, chairman of Apex Tannery, Prof Hasan Azizul Huq of Rajshahi University, M Mujibul Huq, former cabinet secretary, Prof Muhammad Jafar Iqbal of the Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Dr Iqbal Mahmud, former vice chancellor of Buet, Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud of Dhaka University, Latifur Rahman, president of the MCCCI, Barrister Raja Devasish Roy, chairperson of Chakma Chief and Hill Tracts NGO Forum, Prof Abdullah Abu Sayeed, president of Bishwa Shahitya Kendra, ASM Shahjahan, former adviser to the caretaker government, M Syeduzzaman, chairman of the Bank Asia and Prof Muhammad Yunus, managing director of the Grameen Bank Limited.

Rahman himself led

FROM PAGE 1
Sundarbans.

"His (Tarapodo's) son Tapan hit me in the head with a log when his father was going to be slaughtered. Tarapodo managed to run away taking the chance," a source in the DB of Bagerhat who interrogated Rahman at the TFI quoted him as saying.

They chased Tarapodo in a desperate attempt to slaughter him, but failed as villagers came forward and resisted them, the source added.

The police caught Bangla Bhai and others at the house of militant Hekmat Moka in the same village. However, Bangla Bhai was released in a couple of months.

Rahman also admitted that 80 militants received military training in the Sundarbans in June and July, 2004.

He and Bangla Bhai monitored the training on how to operate sophisticated firearms and detonate bombs and grenades, said the Bagerhat DB police.

I visited Bagerhat town and Mollahat and some other upazilas of the district several times between 1997 and 2002 to recruit youths as militants," the DB officials quoted Rahman as saying.

Rahman told the interrogators the decision for countrywide serial blasts was taken at a Majlish-e-Shura meeting held at a house in Mymensingh town in June last year.

MYMENSINGH
Rapid Action Battalion (Rab)-9 arrested JMB activist Fazar Ali in Kutubpur village in Jamalpur in the early hours yesterday. He was an

accomplice of Garibullah, a JMB ehsar member, reports our Mymensingh correspondent.

The Rab also recovered seven books on Jihad from his possession.

The sedition case filed against Rahman, Bangla Bhai and five other Shura members with a Mymensingh court was transferred to the CID following directives from the police high-ups.

BOGRA
The Special Tribunal-4 in Bogra yesterday showed Rahman and Bangla Bhai arrested in a serial blast case as Public Prosecutor Saiful Islam appealed for it, our Bogra correspondent reported.

The court also ordered to include the name of JMB cadre Sirajul Islam alias Banu in the charge sheet as he made judicial confession about his involvement.

The police arrested JMB cadre Abdur Razzak in Gabtoli upazila in September 2004 and submitted the charge sheet against six including Rahman, Bangla Bhai and Razzak to the court on November 9.

Add attorney

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action," he said. "I'll continue if the government asks me to do so."

The government appointed Khan, a former Dhaka District Public Prosecutor (PP), as one of the additional attorney generals on February 2, 2002 for a period of five years after amending the Bangladesh Law Officers Order, 1972.

Bangladesh too good

FROM PAGE 1
captain Steve Tikolo, who missed the game due to fever, found run-making very hard against a versatile Bangladesh attack, fireworks were aplenty when the home side came out to knock off the target in only 23.5 overs.

Dashing right-hander Aftab Ahmed entertained the home fans with a whirlwind 32-ball 50 while opener Javed Omar scored a fluent unbeaten 64 of 79-balls. Hero of the first match at Bogra Shahriar Nafis (28) was the only casualty in Bangladesh's biggest margin victory by wickets edging the 8-wicket thrashing of Zimbabwe last year.

Aftab's back-to-back fifty contained nine savage hits across the rope and two mighty sixes while Javed struck 11 boundaries.

The victory was a strong statement that Bangladesh have come a long way after being bracketed in the same league with their east African rivals only a couple of year's ago.

Bangladesh's improvement was not evident only in batting but also in all departments.

The Kenyan batsmen, whose international exposure has been few and far between since the 2003 World

Cup, found the going tough against the new-ball pair of Mashrafe Bin Mortaza and Syed Raseel after deciding to bat on a slow track.

Man-of-the-match Syed Raseel, who has made it a habit of giving early breakthrough, started the carnage trapping Kennedy Okeno leg before with the scoreboard reading only three runs.

The southpaw then dismissed Toni Suji (11) and Jimmy Kamande (12) to finish with 3-28 in his 10 overs.

Tammy Mishra followed up his first-match 43 with an equally impressive 33 while David Obuya and veteran Hitesh Modi made 30 runs each. But the Kenyans were never able to dominate the disciplined Bangladesh bowling backed up by spirited fielding.

Mashrafe claimed two wickets for 26 runs and left-arm spinner Abdur Razzak also took two for 30.

Experienced wicketkeeper Khaled Mashud also achieved a personal milestone in the match when he plucked a low catch offered by Martin Suji for his 100th dismissals behind the wicket.

The next two games of the series will be played at the Fatullah Stadium on March 23 and 25.

Banks write off

FROM PAGE 1
Banking sources said they have initiated several steps to recover the loans including appointing private recovery agents and paying commission to lawyers and engaging bank staff and land brokers.

An official of a private bank said land is mortgaged against most of the loans and it is very difficult to sell the mortgaged cases.

"In those cases we have engaged land brokers so that the bank at least gets a part of the sale," he said.

Pubali Bank's Managing Director Khandakar Ibrahim Khaled said if their staff can recover any written off loans, they get an incentive of a certain percentage.

"Whatever profit we can make from the written off amount is good. If a bank does not have capital and provision shortfall, the recovered written off loan directly goes to the bank's income," Ibrahim explained.

Bangla Bhai's

FROM PAGE 16
"Bangla Bhai and his men never seemed worried about the consequences of their actions. They would move with police escort. They killed my husband after an announcement," said Rebeka Sultana, wife of Idris Ali Khajur, who was killed and buried after being cut into four pieces in Shimba of Raninghar.

"The government men have sent and sheltered them [JMJB cadres]. We don't dare to file cases against them as they still roam free in the neighbourhood," said Idris's sister Nilima Akhtar.

Rabeya Bewa, mother of Abu Taleb Bhutto, who is still missing, Khodeza Bewa, mother of Golam Rabbani Mukul, who was killed by Bangla Bhai himself, Kohinur Begum, wife of the missing Bhopara Union Parishad chairman, Jaan Box Sardar, all claimed that the brutalities were nothing but political vengeance on them.

"Bangla Bhai Bahini attacked us with hockey sticks while BNP-Jamaat cadres and police wielding firearms were backing them. We had nowhere to go. They even looted my husband's motorcycle from the Union Council office," Kohinur said, narrating the terrible ordeal she and her family had been through.

Shafinur Nahar who had lodged a complaint against the kidnap of her mother, said, "Sub-Inspector Mobarak of Bagmara Police Station still warns us not to pursue the case."

Mohsin, father of Monwar Hossain Babu, the first victim of JMJB tortures, and Lailee Begum, wife of another victim Sheikh Farid, demanded an open trial of Bangla Bhai.

"Bangla Bhai was asking the locals to join in a prayer, stepping on the body of Sheikh Farid," said Wahed Pramanik of Taratia who was also beaten up for refusing to pay them toll.

Rare fishing

FROM PAGE 16
officer, but they declined to take responsibility of the cubs. Forest department also did not take any initiative to rescue the cubs.

Panchagarh correspondent of daily Prothom Alo Shahidul Islam tried without success to nurse the cubs to good health at his home. He fed them oral saline, vitamin C tablets and milk.

Shahidul's family members said they had tried to contact government officials several times but the officials declined co-operate.

On contact, Wildlife specialist Dr Ali Reza Khan said fishing cat cubs rarely survive in captivity. The milk they suckle is high on protein but low on carbohydrate while cow's milk is high on carbohydrate and low on protein. Feeding them regular milk causes malnutrition and diarrhoea leading to death in most cases.

Media hyped

FROM PAGE 1
State Visit to India".

Some of the newspapers highlighted that Khaleda Zia is the longest serving democratically elected prime minister of Bangladesh.

In the supplements, the papers also thanked M Anwarul Haq, minister (Press) of Bangladesh high commission in New Delhi, for his cooperation.

A section of the Indian media in recent days was somewhat pessimistic about the prime minister's visit even till Sunday. But yesterday there was a turn around and the wave of expectations in their articles was

The Hindustan Times headline read "Trust, 'doables' on Khaleda's India Menu". They termed the visit a "landmark" that will concentrate on mending the relationship that has frayed with mistrust and mutual suspicion.

They said quoting senior Indian officials the focus would be to concentrate on "doables" to build trust while not skirting the concerns that have plagued the bilateral dialogues.

Khaleda is coming not as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) chairperson but on a state visit; the first in her second term in office and it indicates the "definite desire" to improve ties. The more the leaders meet and talk the less scope there is for mistrust.

The Hindustan Times quotes Indian officials as saying, "The recent arrests of key terrorist leaders like Bangla Bhai in Bangladesh was a positive sign of Dhaka's acceptance of the problem of Islamist terrorists using the country as a base. Coming out of the denial mode into acceptance mode was the first step to resolve the problem."

Raja Mohan, an eminent analyst and columnist, said in his column that Manmohan Singh must underline the importance of pursuing the long-term interests of India in Bangladesh irrespective of who is in power in Dhaka.

India is seen in Bangladesh as an insensitive neighbour who is obsessed with great power politics and has no time for the region. Whether it is the question of sharing water resources or the growing trade imbalance, India must first demonstrate some empathy with what Dhaka has to say, the column read.

Raja Mohan further suggested "In his talks with Khalida Zia, Manmohan Singh must be ready to proclaim some unilateral decisions on market access and non-tariff barriers without demanding any quid pro quos on transit which New Delhi has long sought."

13 Nepalese

FROM PAGE 16
seized power 13 months ago, they formed a loose alliance with sidelined political parties to press for the restoration of democracy.

On Sunday the Maoists said they had reached an understanding with the parties to hold a mass pro-democracy protest next month as part of an attempt to topple the royal government.

They also called off a six-day-long transport blockade which had caused fuel shortages and sent prices soaring.

King Gyanendra sacked the government and assumed direct control of the impoverished Himalayan nation after blaming politicians for failing to stem the Maoist insurgency.

2 criminals

FROM PAGE 16
"Two local influential people killed my brother, using the Rab members following a dispute over a piece of land at Savar," she told reporters at the DMCH yesterday.

In Faridpur, notorious criminal Zulhas alias Zilhas alias Siam, 22, was killed during a "shootout" between his accomplices and Rab men near government Commerce College in the town, according to the UNB.

Rab arrested Zulhas at Beelmamudpur village under Sadar upazila Saturday evening.

On his confessional statement, the members of the elite force along with Zulhas raided different places in the town on Sunday night to arrest his accomplices and recover firearms.

When they reached near the college at about 4:15am, Zulhas' cohorts opened fire on the law enforcers, forcing them to retaliate.

Zulhas was caught in the 'shootout' and died on the spot, Rab sources said.

Son of Jalal Sheikh of Kamalapur in the town, Zulhas was an accomplice of Bulu and Murad, charged/accused in journalist Goutam Das murder case.

He was wanted in a number of cases, including three for murder, the sources said.

Rab also recovered one revolver, one shotgun and two cartridges from the scene.

Govt invites opposition

FROM PAGE 1
Hasina, who is now in the US.

Top leaders of the 14-party will meet today to discuss the government's invitation, Jaiil told journalists after the presidium meeting.

The proposed dialogue will be on the formation of the committee that will discuss the proposal for reforms in the caretaker government system and the Election Commission.

Bhuiyan in the letter urged the opposition to come to the dialogue with an open mind for the greater interest of the country, nation and democracy. The letter also mentioned that welcoming any constructive proposal is part of BNP's principles and tradition. The PM had taken the matter into consideration and thus extended the proposal for discussion, the letter mentioned. The letter also mentioned that the PM had proposed to form the committee with members of the parliament.

Prime Minister Khaleda Zia on February 28 in her valedictory speech of the last parliament session, proposed to form the committee. AL President Sheikh Hasina

raised a reform proposal in the parliament on February 12 on behalf of the 14-party opposition coalition.

Chief Whip Khandaker Delwar Hossain upon instruction from Mannan Bhuiyan talked to the deputy leader of the opposition on March 12 conveying the proposal for a formal discussion on the issue.

It was learnt that before leaving for India the PM held talks with Finance Minister Saifur Rahman, Mannan Bhuiyan and Health Minister Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain on the opposition's demand for electoral reforms. The PM asked Bhuiyan to officially invite names of representatives from the opposition for the committee she proposed on February 28.

When contacted, Bhuiyan told The Daily Star last night that he hopes the opposition will respond positively to the government's call. "We want to reach an agreeable solution through discussion with the opposition. There is no lack of sincerity on our part," he said.

Yunus for movement

FROM PAGE 1
includes nominating symbolic candidates in the constituencies.

"We have to take preparations from now on for resisting corrupt and incompetent people from entering the next parliament," he said.

"If the corrupt and incompetent candidates get the chance to enter the next parliament, the level of corruption will reach such a stage that violence and unrest in the society will go beyond control."

He observed that the corrupt and incompetent ones could be defeated if all the citizens become aware. He urged the Anti-Corruption Commission to prepare a guideline for the Election Commission (EC) to be followed for preventing the corrupt from being candidates.

"Keeping only loan defaulters out of the election is not enough; rather we should also be aware of the people who are involved in various corruption,"

In his formula, Yunus suggested the launch of a citizens' movement in the name of "honest candidate movement" or "competent candidate movement".

The movement will have a governing committee and an executive body for conducting day-to-day affairs. The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) might work as its secretariat.

The movement will form a central nomination committee and declare in one month a panel of candidates comprising at least one man and one woman for every constituency.

The number of candidates will be increased gradually. The autobiography of the candidates will come out in the newspapers and other media. They will also give interviews before the media to project their main goal.

The candidates will not campaign for election; rather they will campaign for ensuring the defeat of the corrupt and incompetent candidates.

The candidates of the movement will withdraw their candidature if political parties nominate competent candidates in their constituencies.

On the other hand, four candidates of the citizens' movement will contest in the election in those constituencies where the political parties fail to nominate competent candidates.

The group of candidates will have an election symbol from the EC, while only one candidate will contest in the election who gets the symbol. The other candidates will support him/her

and work in favour of him/her.

Civil society members comprising leading politicians, economists, educationists, and social thinkers while speaking at the dialogue felt the necessity for putting pressure on political parties to nominate honest and competent people.

The situation might be changed if the major political parties are pressurised for nominating honest, dedicated and ideal people, they observed.

They said there is no alternative to democratic rule by the elected representatives for realising development potential of Bangladesh. They believe the positive outcome of democracy and development initiated in the 90's could be accelerated further in the current decade.

Desco, Power Grid

FROM PAGE 16
Investment Corporation of Bangladesh (ICB), Dhaka Stock Exchange (DSE), PGCB and Desco participated in the meeting.

Prime Minister (PM) Khaleda Zia at a recent review meeting on the power sector directed the ministry to offload the stakes in the capital market.

The decision was taken in light of the power sector reform programme consistent with the suggestions of the donor agencies.

The move aims to make state-run electricity agencies operationally sound and commercially viable, an official said.

He said the step will ultimately help make the country's share market more vibrant.

The finance ministry has already approved the proposal for offloading the shares of Desco and PGCB.

PGCB is engaged in transmitting power across the country while Desco is responsible for supplying electricity in the capital's Gulshan, Mirpur, and Uttara zones.

A credit rating company was appointed to rate PGCB and Desco before they applied to SEC for direct listings.

Iraq war enters

FROM PAGE 16
"Since (US-led troops) came into Iraq, we get nothing," said Ali Zeidan.

"Three years have passed by for the Iraqi people and they are still suffering psychologically... and economically."