

Saarc FMs agree

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the next level by including trade in services into the agreement. Currently the agreement only includes trade in goods. We are holding discussions about improving on it," said Indian Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon to reporters at post-meeting press conference in New Delhi.

A committee of experts on Safta (South Asian Free Trade Agreement) had already discussed free trade in services in October, which included services like IT and telecommunication, banking and financial services and engineering services.

The overwhelming majority has implemented the Safta agreement and the outstanding problems, regarding Pakistan's reluctance to implement Safta over concerns regarding India, would be solved soon, Menon said when asked to explain the reasons for Safta being 'ineffective'.

Currently intra-Saarc trade constitutes only 5.6% of the total trade conducted by Saarc countries.

Menon said the Standing Committee unanimously decided to recommend granting Iran observer status in Saarc. This is the first summit to be attended by the five new Saarc observers: US, European Union, China, Japan and South Korea.

The committee also decided to recommend the creation of Saarc Food Bank to respond to food crises stemming from natural or other disasters.

The Indian foreign secretary also said that an inter-governmental body is fleshing out effective operational structures of a \$300 million South Asian Development Fund. He said this is necessary to go from 'declaration' to 'implementation' by the Saarc countries.

Bangladesh acting Foreign Secretary Touhid Hossain stressed greater cooperation in the social sectors, particularly health, social development and national disaster management.

Dhaka also pressed the committee to have South Asian University campuses in all other Saarc countries, and not to have the university based solely in Delhi, Touhid said at a briefing for Bangladeshi reporters at Bangladesh High Commission in New Delhi.

Menon said this option is currently being considered and would involve searching for centres of excellence around the region that would hold campuses for each discipline.

He also said the foreign secretaries agreed the need to improve the intra-regional transport network in

22 Hizbut Tahrir

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enforcers raided the place.

"We are worried about our son, as his future is now at stake," said a guardian while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

Denying their involvement in any militant activities, a number of the parents said the spirit of Islam drive their sons and they work for the welfare of the society.

Officer-in-charge (OC) SM Shiblee Numan of Mohammadpur Police Station told The Daily Star that he believes the group's secret meeting was part of their political activities. He, however, said they are yet to find any evidence of militant activities of the group.

"We will finish our investigation in 30 days' time and a number of the arrestees might be remanded if necessary," the OC added.

BDR intervention

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not only for rice and onions but for other produce also.

Prices are lower in the BDR markets because the border security force buys produce directly from growers, eliminating all the cost in between.

"The produce we sell in our markets are bought directly from the growers, eliminating all the cost of the middle agents, and that enables us to keep the prices down. Moreover, we don't have to bribe anybody in the process," said Lt Col Fazle Akbar, chief coordinator of 'Operation Daal Bhaat-2007'.

Even if BDR and retailers of other kitchen markets would buy the same produce in wholesale from Karwan Bazar, BDR would still be able to sell those for much cheaper than other retailers because it would buy those directly from the bazar while the other retailers would get the produce through sales agents, who would sell it to them adding their own profit margins to the cost.

"Prices of different produce are in decline after BDR started selling those in the capital," Anwar, a retailer in Hatirpul kitchen market, told The Daily Star.

"I am very happy to see that the price of every produce is less in TT Para open market than in the nearby kitchen market," said Anwar, a retailer in Hatirpul kitchen market, told The Daily Star.

"If things keep on going like this, we will come to this open market from now on to buy our produce," said a local resident.

"Prices of essentials have gone down and our mission is successful," said Lt Col Fazle Akbar.

"We have succeeded in break-

accordance with the Regional Multi-modal Transport Study that recommended opening up a Dhaka-Lahore corridor, with a possible extension to Kabul.

He said an inter-governmental expert committee on Transport would meet in 6 months to work out the role of each country and divide operations on a national, bilateral and regional bases.

During the meeting many countries suggested improving air links and lower tariffs, as part of the summit's focus on connectivity, he said.

Menon quoted the Sri Lankan foreign secretary as saying that she urged Saarc to implement the instruments included in the Saarc Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism.

A Saarc cultural function will be held in India in November, and there will be meetings of taskforces on micro-finance for women and another taskforce on the trafficking of women and children, Menon said.

The Standing Committee will draft these recommendations today and pass them on to the meeting of Council of Advisers comprising foreign ministers, who will then set the agenda for the Saarc leaders summit.

Fighting erupts for 3rd day in Mogadishu

AFP, Mogadishu

Heavy weapons fire broke out before dawn yesterday in the Somali capital Mogadishu, as the Ethiopian army pressed its land and air offensive against insurgents for a third consecutive day.

After a brief lull since nightfall, detonations could be heard again at 2:30 am (2300 GMT Friday), leaving residents trapped inside their homes amid the worst fighting the city has seen in 15 years.

"We don't know where to go. We are trapped in our houses and dead bodies are lying in the street," a resident in the southern Ali Kamil area, Ibrahim Duale told AFP.

"There is no chance of taking the wounded and dead people because of the heavy artillery and anti-aircraft weapons. It is still continuing and we cannot tell exactly the number of dead. I have seen at least seven bodies and they all lived in the neighbourhood," he said.

Regional coop meet

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He also said although China and India are two major sources of import for Bangladesh, there is a huge trade gap between the two countries and Bangladesh.

"To reduce the trade gap we need to increase our export to those countries through developing our Chittagong Port," he said.

The Zhimin, deputy secretary general of Yunnan Provincial Government of China, Ambassador Eric Gonsalves, a retired officer of the Indian Foreign Service, and Maung Myint, deputy foreign minister of Myanmar, also spoke on the occasion.

The two-day meeting will incorporate five technical sessions on strengthening trade cooperation, promoting transport cooperation, maximising cooperation in tourism, organisational and institutional issues, and BCIM rally 2007.

Rain delays

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Aleem Dar carried out an inspection at noon local time (10:00pm BST) where the New Zealander was hopeful about atleast some play during the day.

"The sun's out, the wind's out, we are coming back out every half hour."

"We are positive we can get a game in. A 2:47pm (12:47 am BST) local time to the presence of wet soggy patches in the outfield prevented play from beginning.

The news was definitely better than what it had looked earlier in the day when it looked highly unlikely that there would be any play after the umpires carried out an inspection at 9:30 am (7:30pm BST) local time to the presence of wet soggy patches in the outfield prevented play from beginning.

This is the second consecutive Bangladesh game to be affected by rain after their final Group B match against Bermuda had been curtailed by the elements into a 21-over tie.

The heavens have opened ever since the Super 8 phase of the World Cup has begun with West Indies suffering the most after having to play on three consecutive games after their match against Australia was moved into a reserve day.

The same fate may await Bangladesh as a worst-case scenario because they face New Zealand in their second match at the same venue on Monday.

Indian agencies

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Intelligence interception of a conversation between four militant organisations, including Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), has set off alarm bells among the summit organisers as it is being seen as a serious threat.

Security is expected to be beefed up in the adjoining areas to preempt any possible threat to the summit that will be attended by the eight leaders of Saarc countries and also by the foreign ministers of China, Japan and South Korea, said Prof Sufi.

"The most ancient silver punch-marked coins found at the site signify the possibility of a centrally controlled currency-based economy in the region," Prof Sufi said.

Etched beads and different earthenwares point to the possibility that there were commercial transactions with the South and Southeast Asia while for a specific kind of earthenware and sandwich glass beads it was with the Mediterranean Roman empire, he added.

The landscape suggests that in ancient time the Brahmaputra, now a few kilometres east of the site, flowed near the village and was used for transportation.

According to Banglapedia, the location of the two villages on a comparatively high, flood-free ground, their proximity to the Brahmaputra at that time and

It is being seen as a serious threat in the wake of a recent seizure of arms and explosives in the Indian southern coast in February, the officer said, adding that

LeT sought assistance from BKL to carry out the attacks, which involved two LeT men to target the summit in New Delhi.

The newspaper also quotes other intelligence agencies as saying that the militants have been trained to act like human bombs and would flee to Kashmir after the attacks.

The 13th Saarc Summit in Dhaka was cancelled in February 2005 due to security concerns. Until now eight Saarc summits have been cancelled.

Aminul Huq

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abducted by Bangla Bhai and his gang and left maimed three years ago, filed the case with Bagmara Police Station in Rajshahi.

Besides Huq, the main accused, four other BNP leaders including Rajshahi district BNP General Secretary Shis Mohammad and 23 JMB operatives are among the accused.

Bagmara police arrested five of the accused shortly after the case had been filed while four others were already detained in different cases.

Those who had been named by Bangla Bhai during interrogation project that will figure at the summit include Saarc Development Fund, Regional Telemedicine

The idea is to make the next two decades of Saarc, as discussed in its last summit in Dhaka, different from the previous 20 years during which many documents were produced with little tangible results.

The summit leaders will finalise the outline of the South Asian University, a large part of which will be based in New Delhi, proposed to be the best in the world with the best students and best faculty. An inter-governmental agreement will be signed at the summit to set up the university.

Other important intra-regional projects that will figure at the summit include Saarc Development Fund, Regional Telemedicine

and BCIM rally 2007.

After getting a huge response from the residents of the capital BDR set up 25 open markets on March 23 where retailers are selling their produce for comparatively cheaper prices than other kitchen markets.

"We are trying our best to bring the prices of essentials down to a tolerable level," Col Md. Aminul Huq, chief of operations of 'Operation Daal Bhaat-2007', said at a news briefing earlier.

Long queues were seen in front of most BDR operated markets in the last three days. The produce in those markets were sold out even before noon as the demand was much stronger than other kitchen markets.

"The produce we sell in our markets are bought directly from the growers, eliminating all the cost of the middle agents, and that enables us to keep the prices down. Moreover, we don't have to bribe anybody in the process," said Lt Col Fazle Akbar, chief coordinator of 'Operation Daal Bhaat-2007'.

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"Prices of different produce are in decline after BDR started selling those in the capital," Anwar, a retailer in Hatirpul kitchen market, told The Daily Star.

"Besides there is no water supply in this open market," said Anwar, adding, "We can't sprinkle water on the produce to keep them fresh."

Wari-Bateswar'

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Ptolemy referred to some "emporia" including Arikamedu of India, Mantai of Sri Lanka, Kion Thom of Thailand, and Oc-Eo of Vietnam. The list also included the name of Sounagoura.

All these places shared some common features--they are the most ancient civilisations of the respective regions, they were all river ports, and they produced monochrome glass beads, he added.

The artefacts unearthed at Wari-Bateswar bear similarity with those found in these empiria sites. Prof Sufi said, adding that they are conducting further research to be certain of their assumption.

Archaeologists said the geographical feature of the site and artefacts discovered here--silver punch-marked coins, different types of earthen pots, ironwares and semi-precious stone beads--prove that the place marked the second phase civilisation in the subcontinent dating back to around 500 BC.

The first phase civilisation is Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro.

An enthusiastic team of the JU archaeology department led by Prof Sufi have been carrying out the excavation at the site, 3km west of Belabo Police Station of Narsingdi, in phases since 2000.

"The city surrounded by two-layer security walls and canals had an industry for making stone beads. The raw materials for those beads, however, did come from abroad, which is why we think that it was a commercial city," Prof Sufi said.

"The most ancient silver punch-marked coins found at the site signify the possibility of a centrally controlled currency-based economy in the region," Prof Sufi said.

Speakers said at the programme that without the whole-hearted interest, integrity and cooperation of Habibullah Pathan and his father, GrameenPhone New Business Division Director Kafil HS Muyeed and JU professor of archaeology AKM Shahinawaz were present at Thursday's programme.

Etched beads and different earthenwares point to the possibility that there were commercial transactions with the South and Southeast Asia while for a specific kind of earthenware and sandwich glass beads it was with the Mediterranean Roman empire, he added.

Muntasir Mamun said the Wari-Bateswar fort city is more or less of the same period as the country's another ancient seat of civilisation, Mahasthangarh of Bogra.

He proposed establishing a museum at the site to preserve and exhibit the artefacts and name it after the father and son.

Muhammad promised to provide necessary financial support for the excavation and building a museum at Wari-Bateswar.

Saarc Summit

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having growing economic and trade relations with the Saarc countries.

Meanwhile, the 28th meeting of the Council of Ministers comprising foreign ministers of the Saarc countries will be held tomorrow, a day before the two-day summit starts.

Foreign ministry officials in Dhaka told The Daily Star that the focus of the summit will be on making the regional grouping a more dynamic organisation and moving it towards implementing some of the crucial regional projects that have long been under discussion.

The landscape suggests that in ancient time the Brahmaputra, now a few kilometres east of the site, flowed near the village and was used for transportation.

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It is not a difficult job for local experts to build large ships on the basis of plans and drawings provided by foreign buyers, he mentioned.

Experts pointed out that ship building in East Asian countries has become costly due to high wages of workers. The industry is gradually shifting towards developing countries mainly for availability of cheap labour force.

Vietnam is now one of the main destinations of foreign ship buyers. But all ship building plants in that country have been booked until

2010. This sector developed in Singapore with labour force from Bangladesh.