

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 a 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 Tuhid 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, Tuhid said at a briefing for Bangladesh 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 a resident of Gopibagh.

"It 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-

Rain delays

FROM PAGE 1
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) start is the latest to get 20 overs each in."

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 began 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 pre-empt 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, reports the Times of India.

The news report states that according to the intercepted message, a meeting was held at the house of a senior leader of Babbar Khalsa International (BKI), a Sikh militant group that was responsible for two simultaneous attacks in Delhi in 2005.

Representatives from the UK-based Muslim-Sikh Council, Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) attended the meeting.

The newspaper quotes a senior security officer as saying that in the intercepted message, the four militant groups discussed possible infiltration into India via the sea-route.

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 BKI 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

FROM PAGE 1
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 have been implicated in the case for masterminding militant operations in Rajshahi, Naogaon and Natore in 2004.

Bangla Bhai and his men kidnapped 43-year-old Fazlur, a farmer, from Hasanpur village in Bagmara, on April 20, 2004. They took him to the JMB concentration camp set up at the house of Liberation War collaborator Ramzan Kaya at Hamirkutsa.

In the case report, Fazlur said he was subjected to gruesome tortures for a ransom of Tk 2 lakh. He alleged that the accused worked in unison to plan and execute his kidnap. They did it with an "uterior political motive".

He said before the kidnap, barrister Aminul and Shis Mohammad met the JMB leaders like they did on many occasions to scheme vigilante operations.

Officer-in-Charge of Bagmara Police Station Mirza Golam Sarwar declined to disclose names of the other accused in the interest of a fair investigation.

"Our hunt is on for the accused still at large," he said.

Those arrested Friday were identified as Akram Hossain, 32, Amjad Hossain, 35, Afzal Hossain, 47, of Hasanpur, Nazrul Islam, 38, of Goalpara in Bagmara of Rajshahi, and Mizanur Rahman, 40, of Katupara of Manda upazila in Naogaon. A court sent them to jail yesterday afternoon.

The four already behind bars are Mustafizur Rahman alias Killer Mastak, Lutfor Rahman, Abdus Sattar, and Ramzan Kaya's son Korban Ali.

Wari-Bateswar'

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

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 excavated at Wari-Bateswar bear similarity with those found in these emporia 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 centre-controlled currency-based economy in the region," 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 Banglapaedia, the location of the two villages on a comparatively high, flood-free ground, their proximity to the Brahmaputra at that time and

access to the Meghna add significance to the site.

Late Mohammad Hanif Pathan, a schoolteacher, first brought the archaeological importance of Wari-Bateswar to light in the 1930s. Later, his son Mohammad Habibullah Pathan took initiatives to collect antiquities and studied them.

The artefacts unearthed at the site during January-April this year were unveiled on Thursday to guests and journalists at a programme organised by archaeo-logical research centre Oitithya Onyeswan.

GramenPhone has been sponsoring the excavation, the next session of which is expected to begin in September.

During this year's excavation, archaeologists unearthed a road, first found during the 2004 excavation, stretched up to 31 metres. The road bears signs of habitation on both sides, Prof Sufi said.

The session's most stunning discovery was, however, a brick-built structure measuring 32x18 square feet thought to be part of a temple around 2,000-2,500 years old.

The age of the structure will be ascertained after carbon-14 test, said Sufi, adding that various kinds of sample from the site are being sent to different places both inside and outside the country for laboratory tests.

Habibullah Pathan, historian Prof Muntassir Mamun, artist Hashem Khan, journalist-writer Shahriar Kabir, GramenPhone New Business Division Director Kafil HS Mueyed and JU professor of archaeology AKM Shahnnawaz were present at Thursday's programme.

Speakers said at the programme that without the whole-hearted interest, integrity and cooperation of Habibullah Pathan and his father, the excavation of the 600x600 square feet area would not have been possible.

Muntassir 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.

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

Network and Regional Food Bank. The leaders will focus on translating these ideas into reality by formulating a time-bound plan.

The member states will press for more intra-regional cooperation in combating the common scourge of terrorism in the region.

The summit will seek greater connectivity in South Asia with the Saarc leaders expected to discuss proposals of Saarc Multi-Modal Transport Study to enhance rail, road and air links, and economic integration through elimination of trade barriers and freer flow of ideas.

Sources said the summit lead-ers will stress converting the group- ing into a "seamless and action-oriented organisation" to usher in a new era of peace and progress in the region.

Foreign ministry officials here said the 14th summit will be for 'connectivity' -- political, economic, ideas and people-to-people -- aimed at promoting mutual prosperity.

This time the summit is likely to 'move the theme of connectivity in very concrete terms' and ensure implementing the ideas raised in the previous meets, one official noted.

Shipbuilding firms

FROM PAGE 1
Chittagong Port Authority (CPA). Previously, such boats used to be imported from Denmark. The company also repaired several large ships belonging to Bangladesh Shipping Corporation (BSC).

"Many ships built here are of international standard because those are built under the supervision of International Classification Society and also under the guidance of the government's Mercantile Marine Department," said Captain Habibur Rahman, principal officer of the department.

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

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Saarc Summit

FROM PAGE 1
have 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 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

Mamun

FROM PAGE 16
The defence submitted a petition seeking cancellation of the remand prayer saying that there was no cause for placing Mamun on remand.

After the hearing, the court rejected the defence petition and placed Mamun on a five-day remand.

The court also directed police to place two other petitions to interrogate Mamun in connection with two other extortion cases on completion of the five-day remand.

The cases were filed against him and his friend Tarique Rahman with Gulshan and Kafrul police stations on March 27.

Mamun was arrested at his house in Banani DOHS on March 26. During the raid, carried out with the assistance of troops and other law enforcers, police seized a .22 bore Spanish pistol and eight bullets.

Listed as a top graft suspect by the Anti-corruption Commission (ACC), Mamun was first taken to the Cantonment Police Station. He was produced before the court on the same day of his arrest.

SALAHUDDIN CASE

Another Dhaka court yesterday sent detained former BNP law-maker Salahuddin Ahmed of Demra to Dhaka Central Jail in connection with a case filed for using a registration number on two of his vehicles.

Metropolitan Magistrate Syed Mojibul Haq passed the order after IO of the case SI Sabur Khan of Shyampur Police Station produced him before the court on completion of a two-day remand.

The joint forces on February 22 impounded five vehicles including two luxury sport utility vehicles (SUV)—a Lincoln Navigator and a Mitsubishi Pajero V6—five computers, and a 42-inch plasma screen television from Salahuddin's Kadamtala, Shyamapur residence in the capital.

The estimated value of the two SUVs and the three other cars—a Toyota Corolla, a Toyota HiLux and a Toyota HiAce—is several crore taka.

The Navigator and the Corolla had the same registration number.

Following the seizure, Shyamapur police filed a fraud case against him on March 4.

At least 10 other criminal cases were filed against him earlier with Shyampur, Jatrabari, Demra and Dhanmondi police stations on different dates. Later, he was taken on a five-day remand in three cases.

BTRC sues Aktel

FROM PAGE 16
(Rab) seized sophisticated equipment used for illegally running VoIP business from the head office of private mobile phone operator Aktel at Gulshan in the capital.

A Rab official seeking anonymity said the case was filed against the company and not against any particular official aiming to realise a huge amount of compensation from the company through legal process.

Sources in Gulshan Police Station said a BTRC assistant director filed the case with the police station under the Bangladesh Telecommunication Control Act.

A Rab official following the drive on Thursday told The Daily Star that using those equipment, Tk 180 crore can be earned annually depriving the government of its revenue.

Aktel provided the VoIP facilities to five companies—Future Data Network, Brothers International, Orbital Technologies, Sun Trading, and Islam and Brothers—for running the illegal business.

5 more JMB

FROM PAGE 16
JMB cadres were arrested in the same upazila.

In Bogra, a police arrested a JMB member at Shantahar in Adamdighi upazila early yesterday.

Acting on a tip-off, the law enforcers raided Dhaka Boarding at around 2:00am and arrested Abdul Haque, 42, of Atrai upazila in Naogaon.

The arrested JMB man was taken to Adamdighi Police Station for interrogation.

Miladunnabi

FROM PAGE 1
include hoisting the national flag atop all government and non-government buildings, publishing supplements in newspapers, displaying banners inscribed with 'Kalema Tayyeba' at important government buildings, establishments and roads, illumination of government and military establishments, arranging milad mahfil and special prayers at Secretariat and Bangabhaban mosques.

Besides, Various religious and socio-cultural organisations have drawn up programmes to observe the day. The programmes include religious processions, milad and doa mahfils and discussions.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs will arrange cultural programme in cultural and educational institutions. The Islamic Foundation will hold discussion meetings, seminars and essay competition under its fortnight-long programme.

Bangladesh Television (BTV), Bangladesh Betar and private TV channels will air special programmes highlighting the significance of the day.

Improved diets will be served in hospitals, prisons, orphanages and child homes.

ME peace efforts

FROM PAGE 16
Riyadh deal, which has been rejected by Israel in its current form.

"I take some confidence from the fact that the meeting of the Arab League not only took place and showed some result but was also received with a cautious response on the part of the Israeli government," German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, presiding over the Bremen meeting, told reporters.

Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn said the Arab initiative and the formation of the Palestinian unity government were positive moves, which lent the possibility of encouraging Israel "to take seriously the hand extended by the Arabs".

The Arab blueprint offers Israel full normalisation of relations if it withdraws from all land occupied in the 1967 war and allows the creation of a Palestinian state and the return of Palestinian refugees.

Though Israel rejected the plan, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said in interviews published Friday that the Jewish state could clinch global peace with its enemies within five years.

On the final day of their meeting, the EU ministers were briefed by Solana on his discussions at the Arab League summit.

The EU ministers also discussed how to deal with the new Palestinian government, which includes ministers from the militant Muslim Hamas and the moderate Fatah groups.

So far the unity government has not accepted the conditions fixed by the international Quartet for full renewed engagement; renunciation of violence, recognition of Israel and abiding by past agree-

Bird flu

FROM PAGE 16
the capital following confirmation of bird flu. The chickens were culled under the supervision of livestock officials.

In Jessore, livestock officials culled 73 chickens at a farm in Sharsha upazila.

Our Gazipur correspondent reports that Rapid Response Team in the district yesterday conducted search at 70 poultry farms with 1,28,750 layers and 25,910 broilers. Sixty-four chickens were found dead at the farms, and this was quite normal, team sources said.

Rejoinder

FROM PAGE 1
and fishermen alleged that the forest officials neglected their duties and made unnecessary delay in reaching the spot.

Claiming that these allegations are not true, the rejoinder said Forest Department was informed of the incident at 4:00pm on March 19 and immediately local forest staff rushed to the area and tried to control the fire with the help of local people despite limitation of their fire fighting equipment.

Effective steps taken by the forest officials brought the fire under control in a short time, it said.

Iran warns Britain

FROM PAGE 16
"uncalled-for interference in a completely bilateral affair between Iran and Britain."

EU foreign ministers at a meeting in Germany on Friday deplored the seizure of the Britons as a breach of international law and threatened to take "appropriate measures" if they were not released soon.

The EU move came after Britain on Thursday secured a UN Security Council statement on the Iranian action, but which was less strident than London had hoped for.

Tehran has so far refused to bow to mounting pressure to release the naval personnel, who are being held in a secret location and occasionally put on television allegedly confessing to and apologising for their transgressions.

Britain insists they were on a routine anti-smuggling patrol in Iraqi waters under a UN mandate but Iran says they were in its territorial waters.

Several conservative Iranian MPs and clerics are demanding the detainees be put on trial.

But Iran's ambassador to Moscow denied media reports originally from Russian television quoting him as suggesting the 15 might face trial.

"The network has made a mistake in translating the comments about detained British personnel and has reported the possibility of their trial," Gholam Reza Ansari told the Iranian state news agency IRNA.

In comments on the channel's Internet site, Ansari was quoted as saying "no kind of apology has been received from the British side and as a result the case has taken on a juridical form."

Earlier, IRNA itself had published what it said were excerpts from the interview in which Ansari was quoted as saying the British sailors "could go on trial for this illegal act".

ments.

Solana, who hailed a "new Arab consensus", set the tone for relations with the Palestinian unity government by talking in Riyadh to the non-Hamas president Mahmud Abbas and foreign minister Ziad Abu Amr but not the Hamas prime minister Ismail Haniya.

His spokeswoman said the EU had agreed it would work "with the members of the government which are not Hamas, in particular Abbas, Abu Amr and the finance minister."

Like the United States, the EU considers Hamas a terrorist organisation and boycotted the Hamas-led Palestinian administration, which preceded the unity government.

The EU ministers will also be discussing how to continue sending aid to the Palestinians without dealing directly with Hamas, and a possible restructuring of the temporary mechanism to aid "institution building" in the Palestinian territories rather than simple social welfare aid.

As the ministers met, German Chancellor Angela Merkel began a trip to Jordan, Israel, Lebanon and the Palestinian territories.

She said the Arab League agreement had "created a lot of movement".

However, EU diplomats warn that the Palestinian refugee issue remains one serious stumbling block to peace.

Almost 4.5 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants live today in dozens of refugee camps across the Middle East in precarious conditions.

Israel vehemently rejects any suggestions of the refugees being allowed to return, arguing that the influx would effectively erase the Jewish character of the state.

Dhaka asks

FROM PAGE 1
According to a World Bank report, over 15% of Bangladeshi imports come from India, while Bangladeshi goods account for only 1% of Indian imports. Currently trade between Bangladesh and India stands at \$2 billion a year.

Iftekhar added that Mukherjee was receptive to this particular proposal, as they also decided to revive the annual foreign secretary-level meeting between the two countries, which has not been held for the past two years