

Saarc Summit

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Fund and the Regional Multimodal Transport Study (RMTS), which outlines a Dhaka-Kabul corridor, will not be finalised during this summit and matters would be deferred to later meetings.

Sri Lanka and India came out strongly against terrorism at the meetings in the lead-up to the summit. Both the countries said they would stress the importance of combating the menace multilaterally.

"We, in principle, have agreed to implement the existing commitments (to terrorism) and go beyond them," Indian Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon said, adding that both the foreign secretaries and ministers have recommended that the summit make a strong statement against terrorism.

"It is indeed a very important matter. We hope the summit will reflect its importance," said Menon, addressing the daily press briefing at the summit media centre in New Delhi.

Sri Lanka has proposed that the regional grouping should take steps to prevent the linkages between trade in narcotics and terrorism especially the terror financing through narcotics.

Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Rohitha Bogollagama on Sunday told reporters, "Counter-terrorism will be at the forefront of Sri Lanka's agenda in the summit. We have the cooperation of all other member states in this regard."

Foreign Affairs Adviser Iftexhar Ahmed Chowdhury said, "We are behind Sri Lanka in regard to terrorism, as we are committed to eradicating terrorism from South Asia together."

In October 2007, Sri Lanka will host a legal experts' meeting on "Mutual legal Assistance on Criminal Matters" that would seek to flesh out ways to cooperate on crimes with multiple sources and that require multilateral or bilateral cooperation.

Sources say, however, possibilities of an extradition treaty to be included in a possible convention on the matter irked Pakistan, which deferred matters to the next meeting.

"We did not have identical processes regarding this matter. We (India) have offered a draft and once the draft is done and the meeting takes place, we can look into the matter further," the Indian foreign secretary said.

South Asian Free Trade Area (Safta), meanwhile, has taken a backseat, as Pakistan's reluctance to implement the agreement over a dispute with India continues.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid M Kasuri and his Indian counterpart Pranab Mukherjee, however, said that they will soon resolve the dispute on account of the recent India-Pakistan 'goodwill'.

Even when intra-Saarc trade constitutes only 5.6% of trade by the seven Saarc states the countries have yet to resolve the issue and give a timeline for full implementation.

Both foreign minister- and secre-

tary-level pre-summit meetings have discussed taking the agreement to the 'next level' to include trade in services into the free-trade agreement.

Shivshankar Menon said the Council of Ministers yesterday took significant steps to operationalise Saarc Development Fund (SDF) and on a possible 'soft wing' to look into poverty alleviation projects, and a commercial wing to develop infrastructure.

"The ministers have come to a clear conclusion that the SDF would be exclusive domain of the member states and would mobilize already existing funds," said Menon, adding, "The issue would be further discussed in the next council of ministers to be held in November this year."

Two other matters that have been prominent and finalised in principle are the South Asian University (SAU) and the Saarc Food Bank.

The SAU is likely to be based in Delhi, but Bangladesh has proposed that each country should have a campus as centres of excellence.

Meanwhile, the Food Bank is being set up to provide emergency food requirements in times of natural or other disasters. Each country would have their separate banks, which would have to be replenished under their own responsibility.

Bangladesh Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz, Sri Lanka President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom, Afghan President Hamid Karzai, Bhutan Prime Minister Khandu Wangchuk and Nepal Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala will attend the summit.

Sri Lanka

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advances into jungle territory dominated by the guerrillas in the region.

Sri Lankan jets and helicopter gunships carried out night-time bombing raids against Tiger rebel positions over the weekend.

However, defence officials had said that the guerrillas still had the ability to stage hit-and-run attacks.

The government has vowed to drive out Tamil Tigers from the sprawling Eastern Province, where the guerrillas maintain strongholds deep inside jungles.

In other violence, six civilians were shot dead in Batticaloa, just north of Ampara, on Sunday night and the military and the Tigers blamed each other for the massacre.

Another four civilians were gunned down on Sunday night in the north of the island. The Tiger rebels accused a breakaway faction allied with government forces of carrying out the attacks.

The Tamil rebels have waged a 35-year campaign for independence that has claimed more than 60,000 lives in Sri Lanka.

More than 4,000 people have been killed in the latest upsurge of fighting that began in December 2005 despite a truce arranged in 2002.

worth Tk 10,000 crore from various local banks. The BPC owes another Tk 4000 crore to some international borrowers.

The BPC imports 38 lakh metric tonnes of petroleum oil at a price that is progressively higher than the sale price beginning from 1997-98, prior to which, the BPC was making profits by hundreds of crore annually.

Coupled with annual losses, the BPC is now hard hit with huge non-payment for fuel purchase by Bangladesh Biman. Loss-incurring Biman's arrears with the BPC stood at Tk 1,567 crore in December 2006.

The new diesel price still remains Tk 4 per litre below the break-even point as its production cost is Tk 44 per litre. Even the production cost of kerosene is higher than the selling price, at Tk 45. Therefore, the BPC will continue to incur loss by Tk 4 and Tk 5 by selling these products.

However, this loss would be minimised by the new price of petrol and octane, which had remained a high profit product for the BPC. The new price will put the BPC's profit margin for both petrol and octane to Tk 27 per litre.

"The new prices will not reduce the losses of BPC completely, for it will incur another Tk 90 crore loss till June with this new sale price," the energy secretary said adding that a new petroleum pricing formula will be introduced soon.

A petroleum price review committee would be formed with the BPC chief and members from stakeholders to examine the prices of petroleum products monthly. If the monthly review indicates a variation in the fixed price in excess of 5 percent from that of the earlier month, the tariff will be adjusted at that time before the date fixed for quarterly adjustment.

Back in 2003, the government had decided to introduce a pricing formula, but the decision was not implemented.

Shamim Osman

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the cases, sources said.

Meanwhile, the commission filed a graft case yesterday against former administrative officer of the Prime Minister's Office, SM Ahsan Habib, who is currently the assistant director of the Board of Investment (BoI), on charges of taking bribe of Tk 93.5 lakh.

ACC's Assistant Director Samsul Alam filed the case against Habib with Tejgaon police station mentioning that the accused had taken Tk 93.5 lakh in bribe from Choudhury Afzal Hossain, owner of Munni Traders, on different dates between April 06, 2002 and June 30, 2003.

According to the complainant Habib took the bribe from Afzal for releasing confiscated Benson Hedges and 555 cigarettes and for securing a government order for re-export of the items, abusing his power.

Habib took Tk 25 lakh on September 11, 2002 through a pay order from the principal branch of Social Investment Bank Ltd. He received another Tk 25 lakh pay order on September 21, 2002 from Afzal.

Both the cheques were deposited in Habib's account with the PMO branch of Sonali Bank on September 14, 2004 and September 23, 2004 respectively.

The former PMO official withdrew Tk 35 lakh on December 11, 2002, Tk 4 lakh on April 30, 2003, Tk 2.5 lakh on May 30, 2003, and Tk 2 lakh on June 30, 2003 from the account through bank cheques.

Miladunnabi

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Bangabhaban in the afternoon. President Iajuddin Ahmed, Chief Adviser Fakhruddin Ahmed, Speaker Jamiruddin Sircar, Chief Justice Md Ruhul Amin, former presidents, deputy speaker, former chief advisers and advisers, judges of the Supreme Court, election commissioners and high civil and military officials were present at the mahfil.

Thousands of devotees, carrying banners inscribed with 'KalemaTayyeba', joined the processions brought by religious organisations.

The Ministry of Women and Children Affairs arranged cultural programmes in cultural and educational institutions while the Islamic Foundation held meetings, and seminars.

The day was a public holiday. Immediate past prime minister and BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia visited the grave of president Ziaur Rahman on the day.

She prayed for the eternal peace of the departed soul of Ziaur Rahman and peace, progress and prosperity of the country and Muslim Ummah.

BNP senior leader Abdul Matin Chowdhury, Brigadier General (ret'd) Hannan Shah, Nazrul Islam Khan were, among others, present.

Yunus returns

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France, the mayor of Paris and the foreign minister of France.

He visited Portugal and held meeting with the Portuguese President and the Portuguese Secretary of State.

During his visit to the United Kingdom (UK), Prof Yunus was accorded a reception by the London borough of Tower Hamlets Local Government. Mayor of London attended the reception as the chief guest.

The Nobel laureate also spoke at the Oxford University elaborating his concept of social business. He also addressed the Skoll World Forum Award-2007 function at the university.

On the last leg of his tour, Prof Yunus launched a Norwegian government micro-finance initiative. He held meetings with the Norwegian prime minister and the minister for development. He attended the launching ceremony of the chair named "Dr Muhammad Yunus Development Studies and Micro-finance" at the Norwegian School of Management.

Bird flu

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"But we have to be very careful regarding the matter," he said while speaking as the chief guest at a seminar held at the auditorium of Square Hospital.

He also urged the media to make people aware about bird flu by presenting authentic news.

Around 6,000 chickens were culled at Mukta Poultry farm at Sadar upazila and Chistia Poultry Farms at Fatullah upazila in the district on Sunday night, reports our Narayanganj correspondent.

District Livestock officer Dr Abu Taher said they sent samples to the Central Laboratory as more than 200 abnormal deaths of chicken were detected.

The administration so far culled not less than 12,000 chickens at seven farms in Sadar, Bandar, and Sonargaon upazilas in the district, sources in the administration said, adding that three of the seven farms had confirmed bird flu case while culling was done in four other farms on suspicion.

Around 10,000 chickens also died abnormally. The administration has sealed off all the poultry farms in Bandar and Sadar upazilas, keeping vigil all over the district.

Meanwhile, 2,681 chickens were culled at Sardar farm at Hemayetpur in Savar on Sunday night. Following detection of avian influenza in the afternoon the administration arranged the culling within a few hours, said sources working with the Bird Flu Control Room.

Brand of democracy

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hotel in the capital organised by the association with its own President Prof Ataur Rahman in the chair. Dr Zillur R Khan, Rosebush professor emeritus of the University of Wisconsin, USA also presented a keynote paper on 'Rethinking Political Development: Security, Justice and Leadership'.

According to a report by the state-run news agency BSS, the president in his inaugural speech said, "The present government is carrying out a number of fundamental reforms to strengthen democracy and establish good governance and rule of law in the country."

He said political development means security and freedom for the people of a nation in today's complex world while security of a state depends on both military and non-military aspects.

"A nation state, therefore, must find an integrated approach that can ensure its physical security as well as participatory decision making in a democratic process. Security and democracy are thus intricately connected with the concept of national sovereignty," he added.

"Safeguarding of national sovereignty is vital but protecting the people against famine, disasters and internal disorders is essential," the president said.

Lt Gen Moeen said a credible defence force is essential against external threats of different varieties while on the other hand a nation must also ensure the security of its people through meeting their basic needs.

"I believe the aspiring democratic process of Bangladesh and the current transition period allow us an opportunity to develop a new concept and find a new sense of direction to the future politics of Bangladesh. By its own merit the country has a principle to live by and a purpose to strive for, and this needs rethinking so that we can reinvent a system of governance with new leadership at all levels," Moeen said in his keynote paper on 'The Challenging Interface of Democracy and Security'.

"It is the people of Bangladesh who will decide whether they want a new platform to lead them into the future," Moeen said in reply to a question. He also said if a political party is for the people then it should find out what the people of the country want instead of what its members and patrons want.

The nation must not keep looking at the parties rather it should realise its own goals by asserting how and by whom it wants to be led and how to develop the economy, Moeen added.

"If you look at the parties that came to power through our history, you will see that they only gathered things for themselves and not for the people," he said.

Referring to the situation regarding manpower export to Malaysia he said every migrating worker had to pay about Tk 3 lakh before but now Tk 1 lakh is all they need for the purpose. "So who took the extra money from the poor people?" he asked.

"The roadmap to democracy lies, I presume, with objectives as envisioned by the government through anti-corruption drive and reform packages, within affordable time frame that will steer the country away from escapism and build strong foundation of validity on democracy," Moeen said in his keynote paper.

When asked what he meant by 'affordable timeframe', the army chief said the timeframe should be set by the events leading up to achieving the goals of reforms instead of only the time elapsed.

"The government will take a decision on the matter and I think it will depend on the Election Commission, how much time it will need to bring necessary changes as well as to complete its preparations for a free, fair and credible election," Moeen said.

"We do not want to go back to an

'elective democracy' where corruption in society becomes all pervasive, governance suffers in terms of insecurity and violation of rights, and where political 'criminalisation' threatens the very survival and integrity of the state," the army chief said.

He also said governance through a caretaker system is a very apolitical idea, yet one has to accept the reality considering that poor governance and corrosive corruption almost destroyed the fabric of the society.

"On the other hand, we have to read the resolute character of the Bangladeshi people that enabled us to overcome the perpetuation of dynastic rule for a transparent and accountable Bangladesh," Moeen added.

Law Adviser Mainul Hossain was also present as a special guest.

Salahuddin

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City Bank, police said, adding money earned from advertisement used to be deposited in the account.

CASE AGAINST MAMUN
Contractor Mir Zahir filed the extortion case against Mamun, close friend and business partner of former premier Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, and six others with Dhanmondi Police Station for extorting Tk 53 lakh from him.

The complainant in his case statement said that Mamun and his six other cohorts forced him to pay the toll on March 14 and April 27 in 2004.

The other accused in the case are Abdul Kader, Kamrul, Mahbub, Hablu, Mota Tareq and Manik.

Mamun, now on police remand in an extortion case, is already facing four extortion charges.

Meanwhile, a Dhaka court yesterday placed former BNP lawmaker from Demra Salahuddin Ahmed on a three-day remand in connection with a case filed with Dhanmondi Police Station on March 7 on charge of embezzling Tk 30 lakh from a real estate company.

The former BNP lawmaker was earlier taken on seven days' remand in four phases in as many cases.

Tarique's petition

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the IO has to submit the charge sheet against him or her within seven days from the day the "offence" was committed.

The case was filed on March 8 even though the "offence" took place on January 4. So, the process of submitting the charge sheet violated the provision of the act.

As the IO did not follow the provisions of the act in submitting the charge sheet, they had earlier submitted a petition to the lower court challenging the legality of the IO's submitting the charge sheet but the lower court had rejected it, the lawyer added.

The lower court also fixed tomorrow for hearing on charge framing against Tarique and Apu of the case.

On March 18, the IO submitted the charge sheet against Tarique and Apu before the Court of Chief Metropolitan Magistrate (CMM) showing 12 people as prosecution witnesses.

The joint forces arrested Tarique at his mother former prime minister Khaleda Zia's cantonment home on March 8.

Later, he was taken on a four-day remand for interrogation to find out the vital clues about the extortion case.

He is now serving a month's detention in Dhaka Central Jail.

Tarique was also shown arrested in connection with the Tk 81 lakh extortion case filed with Gulshan Police Station on March 27.

Khaleda

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high commissioner in Dhaka, said a BNP press release yesterday.

"I am confident that under your wise and capable leadership, the 14th Saarc Summit will carry forward the important legacy of the Dhaka Declaration and make a significant impact on what late President Ziaur Rahman identified as Saarc's overarching priority namely, to visibly improve the quality of life of our peoples in an environment of peace and harmony," Khaleda, who chaired the 13th Saarc summit, said in her letter.

The Dhaka Declaration underscored three cardinal elements -- to consolidate past gains made in the first two decades of Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation), to promote more vibrant process of constructive regional cooperation and to translate into concrete actions regional initiatives and actual projects, the letter read.

The 13th summit charted a set of objectives to promote cooperation in core economic areas, including the creation of a wider economic space in South Asia, she added.

"The signing at the Summit of regional agreements on customs, taxation, investment and arbitration will facilitate intra regional trade but more such agreements need to be concluded," added the BNP chairperson hoping for a fruitful 14th Summit.

9 more JMB

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27 militants and their patrons including former post and telecommunications minister barrister Aminul Haque, deputy minister of land Ruhul Kuddus Talukhdar Dulu and lawmaker Nadim Mostafa.

Another torture victim, Muhidul Islam Khan, filed another case the same day with Naldanga PS in Natore.

However, police are still reluctant to go after the accused big guns in the last BNP-Jamaat alliance government despite allegations that they are the masterminds and patrons of militants in the country.

"We are not thinking of arresting them [accused militant patrons] right now... We are examining allegations [made in cases]," said Rajshahi division police's DIG (deputy inspector general) AKM Shahidul Haque while talking to The Daily Star yesterday.

"No one [accused] will be spared if sufficient evidence is found against the accused," Haque added.

Former deputy minister for land Ruhul Kuddus Talukhdar Dulu already surrendered before a Dhaka court after he was asked to submit his wealth statement. He is now accused in about 15 cases for corruption, terrorism and torture.

S Asia Media

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yesterday during the lunch break of the council of ministers meet ahead of the Saarc summit. They pledged to ease visa restrictions for journalists of Saarc countries.

Accepting a key demand of media persons, foreign ministers of Saarc nations decided to give visa stickers to 50 journalists from each member country to facilitate their movement within the region.

Indian External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee told the conference, "India will initiate the liberalisation of its visa regime for journalists from the region."

He said journalists are crucial in strengthening information connectivity among Saarc citizens to form the core of Saarc's base: a South Asian identity, culture and ambition.

Immigration officials from Saarc countries will meet within a few months to see how this decision can be implemented, Indian Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon said last evening. The respective governments will issue the visa stickers.

Indian journalist N Ram will chair the commission while each country will have its own chapter. The Bangladesh chapter will be represented by News Today Editor Reazuddin Ahmed, Bangladesh Observer Editor Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury, The Daily Star Editor Mahfuz Anam, ATN Bangla Chief Reporter Munni Saha and two representatives each from the National Press Club and Bangladesh Federal Union of Journalists (BFUJ).

Telenor wants

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GrameenPhone," he said, adding, "We think it is important that the people of Bangladesh and all customers of GrameenPhone can become owners of this successful company."

Fredrik said he met Prof Muhammad Yunus, who represents Grameen Telecom, during his Norway visit and discussed about this issue and others.

Norwegian daily Dagbladet on March 29 reported that Telenor has been offered 2.6 billion Norwegian krone (Nkr) by Bangladesh's Grameen Telecom to give up control of the pair's joint venture, GrameenPhone.

Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus of Grameen Telecom that holds 38 percent share of the GrameenPhone, was quoted by the newspaper as saying, "We don't demand that Telenor sell down its stake to under 35 percent; we will be content if we have 51 percent of the shares."

For this to happen, Telenor will have to cut its stake from the existing 62 percent stake to 49 percent.

At the current market price, this 13 percent stake will be worth 2.6 billion Nkr, according to the report.

"We don't ask for charity or donations," Yunus was quoted as saying "We want to pay Telenor the full market price for the shares."

Telenor's controlling stake in GrameenPhone has long been a contentious issue with Yunus having regularly said he wants GrameenPhone to be owned by the poor women of Bangladesh.

GrameenPhone was formed in 1996 by Telenor along with Grameen Telecom, a division of Grameen Bank.

15 killed in Solomons quake, tsunami

AFF, Wellington

A powerful undersea earthquake unleashed a tsunami that pounded into the western Solomon Islands early yesterday, destroying entire villages and reportedly killing at least 15 people, officials said.

The wall of water triggered by the 8.0-magnitude quake -- which witnesses said was up to five metres (16.5 feet) high -- swamped towns, flattened homes, and sparked panic among residents of the impoverished South Pacific state.

Communications to the quake-hit area were patchy, making it difficult to assess the number of dead and injured and the damage, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare told CNN.

The Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre issued a regionwide warning immediately after the quake, stretching as far away as Japan, but later cancelled it.

At least 15 people were killed in and around Gizo, the main town in Western Province and a popular tourist and diving spot 40km from the quake's epicentre, the provincial leader said.

"Reports have come in that more than 15 people died, just around Gizo, but with the other islands I cannot tell you," premier Alex Lokopio told Radio New Zealand.

The central government reported 12 deaths and the police at least four, but Sogavare warned the death toll would likely rise once rescue teams reached the area.

"Most of the islands are low-lying, and the extent of the damage is yet to be known," the prime minister said, adding that a team from his office, the Red Cross and the police were headed to the area.

"It's a very trying time for us."

In the capital Honiara, the head of the Solomons National Disaster

Regional

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accelerate the activities of the forum. Governments of China and Myanmar provide support for the forum.

Che Zhimin, deputy secretary general of Yunnan Provincial Government of China, Ambassador Eric Consalves, a retired officer of the Indian Foreign Service, and Maung Myint, deputy foreign minister of Myanmar, Debapriya Bhattacharya, executive director, CPD, also spoke on the occasion.

Aminul, Dulu, Nadim

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rise of Islamic militancy in the northern districts.

In their cases, Muhidul and Ayub alleged that the militants had tortured and extorted money from them in collusion with the accused BNP leaders. Bangla Bhai, who was executed along with his chief Abdur Rahman and four other militants late Thursday night, would keep in contact with the former ministers and lawmakers over cell phones during their vigilante operations in 2004.

Muhidul accused 21 people including Dulu, Nadim, Siddiqui Islam alias Bangla Bhai while Ayub brought charges against Aminul Huq, Dulu and Nadim and 27 others.

MUHIDUL'S CASE
Muhidul used to work at the rice mill owned by Nadim. Dulu's cadres picked him up from Akkelpur at Naldanga on June 13, 2004. He was tied up before being taken to Amtali school ground where he was asked to pay Tk 20,000.

"Our leaders think police are not enough to contain the outlaws and so they assigned us with the job. Now you have to contribute to the funds needed for that," Muhidul in his complaint quoted one of the militants as saying.

But as he refused to pay the amount, they gave him a severe beating. Muhidul said he had heard from Bangla Bhai and some of his men boasting of staying in touch with the then ministers and lawmakers.

Besides, JMB cadre Ratan told him that Bangla Bhai and his gang had held a meeting with Dulu and Nadim Mostafa at Dulu's village home at Ramsa Kazipur.

Muhidul was freed after his relatives managed Tk 10,000 for the militants, additional superintendent of police in Natore Fazlur Rahman said briefing journalists about the case.

The other accused are Ratan, Kalu, Ibrahim, Kawsar, Afzal, Amjad, Golap, Hafizur, Aser, Abdur Razzak, Yunus, Ataur and Abdul Kuddus.

AYUB'S CASE
Abdul Jalil Amin and his group waylaid farmer Ayub Ali Pramanik, 55, while he was going to his work in the morning of April 7, 2004. They asked him to pay Tk 1 lakh for what they said was a drive to rid the area of Sarbahars.

But as he said 'no' he was tied and blindfolded and taken to the house of Ramzan Kaya, a collaborator during the Liberation War, at Hamirkutsa.

There, Bangla Bhai beat him up. After daylong torture, he gave in to the demand and was freed.

Council, Fred Fakari, told journalists: "Some villages are completely wiped out."

The government's communications unit reported six bodies found floating in seas near Gizo town, hours after the shallow quake struck at 7:40 am (2040 GMT Sunday).

The US Geological Survey reported a series of aftershocks measuring up to a magnitude of 6.7.

Across the Pacific, governments from Australia to New Caledonia and the Northern Marianas evacuated schools and ordered coastal residents to move to higher ground, but no damage was immediately reported.

Lokopio, the premier of Western Province, said there was a desperate need for emergency supplies in the Gizo area, where residents remained on a hill behind the town amid strong aftershocks.

Tigers dismissed

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the 16th over. Making his World Cup debut, Javed scored 22 before edging a simple catch behind the wicket.

Aftab Ahmed and Shakib Al Hasan added 43 runs for the third wicket. But Aftab, who was looking good, paid the price for going over the top and was caught at long-on after making 27 off 38 balls that contained three boundaries.

A fast and furious Shane Bond, who conceded only five runs in his first five overs, then returned for his second spell in the 36th over to knock off the stumps of Shakib (25) and wicketkeeper Mushfiqur Rahim (0) that effectively dismissed Bangladesh's chances of posting even a decent total.

Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar (9) chased a second run only to find himself short of his crease before a direct throw from Jacob Oram broke the stumps.

Mohammad Ashraf (3) tried to run one down the thirdman but only managed to drag the ball on to his stumps.

Bangladesh made two changes from the side with left-arm seamer Syed Rasal coming in for Tapash Baisya.