

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 Iftekhar 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 Fakhrul 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 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.

Fuel prices hiked

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Tk 15 to Tk 20 extra fare."

The government will monitor the transport sector strictly, so that none can raise fares unjustifiably, he pointed out.

"We expect that the transport owners would be understanding and would refrain from unfair hike in transport fares," he said.

On the negative impact of the fuel price hike on the farmers, the energy adviser noted that since the season for Boro cultivation is almost over, this hike would not affect them much.

"But we hope that the next budget will accommodate some form of subsidy for the farmers. Right now, the agriculture and the finance ministries are working on how to offer the farmers this benefit," he said.

Talking to the press separately at his office, Finance Adviser Mirza Azizul Islam said, "We are examining the ways for providing a relief to the poor for the price hike of diesel and kerosene."

Both the advisers expressed hope that the raise in fuel prices would not lead to price hike of essentials and the inflation rate would remain within 7 percent.

The last increase in prices of petroleum products took place in June 2006. Back at that time, the government raised the price of diesel by only Tk 3 per litre to Tk 33, although diesel forms more than 60 percent of the total petroleum consumption. In contrast, the price of octane jumped to Tk 58 per litre from Tk 45 and petrol to Tk 56 from Tk 43, whereas they represent only 10 percent of the total consumption.

The price of diesel was not raised too much as it directly affects the poorer section of the society.

However, the move did not save the government run petroleum sector from landing in a deeper crisis.

The cumulative loss of the BPC has reached a colossal Tk 11,721 crore in January this year. Once a profit-making entity, the corporation is now incurring a monthly loss of Tk 200 crore. It is now unable to pay back loans along with interests

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 Chowdhury Afsal Hossain, owner of Munni Traders, on different dates between April 06, 2002 and June 30, 2003.

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

old system 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.

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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 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.

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 Hemayeturin 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.

The University Ordinance-1973

should be amended immediately in

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.

"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.

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 prime minister Khaleda Zia's son Tarique Rahman, and six others with Dhamondi 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, Moti 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 Dhamondi Police Station on March 7 on charge of extorting 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 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.

Seniority, competence