

CA holds talks

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The CA also held bilateral meetings with President of the Maldives Maumoon Abdul Gayoom and Prime Minister of Nepal Girija Prasad Koirala.

He said Bangladesh attaches great importance to its relation with Sri Lanka based on common culture and heritage.

The CA said operation of air services between Dhaka and Colombo in private sector will further expand trade relations and people-to-people contact.

He also emphasised quick ratification of Shipping Agreement between the two countries to expand business and economic ties.

During the meeting, national election in Bangladesh and issues related to mutual interests also came up.

Mahinda also thanked Bangladesh for imparting training to members of Sri Lankan armed forces at National Defence College.

The CA apprised the Lankan president of his government various reforms activities towards election and successful completion of voter list with photographs and national ID card of 80 million voters in less than a year.

He thanked the Sri Lankan president for excellent arrangement for hosting the 15th Saarc summit beginning today.

TALKS WITH GAYOOM
During bilateral meeting with Maldives President Maumoon Abdul Gayoom at Cinnamon Grand Hotel in the afternoon, the CA stressed the need for Saarc plan of action to address the issue of climate change, as south Asian countries are acutely vulnerable to the effects of the menace.

They discussed the worst impacts of climate change on Bangladesh and the Maldives and stressed that the world community should come forward to address the problem.

"We are the first victim of climate change," the Maldives presi-

dent said, adding that his government is trying to build up awareness linking climate change, human rights and environment.

The CA said Bangladesh is now vocal against climate change.

In the meeting, the Maldives sought Bangladesh's support in becoming

UN Security Council member in 2019 and member of ECOSOC in the year 2011.

KOIRALA
At the bilateral meeting with Nepalese Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala, The CA said Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, the poorest countries under the Saarc, should work together to get rid of poverty.

He also apprised the Nepalese leader of his government's reforms measures and steps towards holding the general election in December this year.

The Nepalese prime minister apprised the CA of his country's latest political situation regarding formation of the new government.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim briefed newsmen about the meetings.

Earlier, Chief Adviser Fakhrudin Ahmed was accorded a red carpet reception as he arrived at Bandarnaike International Airport (BIA) at Katunayake.

Sri Lankan Prime Minister Ratnasiri Wickramanayake and his wife received the CA and his wife at the airport. Two tiny tots presented bouquets to the chief adviser and his spouse.

A contingent of Sri Lankan army gave a guard of honour to the chief adviser. The airport ceremonies over, he flew into the Sri Lankan capital by helicopter.

Thereafter, the CA drove in a ceremonial motorcade to Cinnamon Grand Hotel where he will stay during the summit meet of the heads of government or state of the South Asian countries that begins here today.

Kuwait

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Kuwait also freed 300 as their involvement in the demonstrations was not proved. They assured us that they would not deport any workers who were not involved in the strikes," he said.

On exactly how many workers will be sent back, he said the Kuwaiti government has not informed them of the figure. "We asked the Kuwaiti authorities not to make any further arrests," he said.

The Bangladesh Embassy also asked Kuwait not to take any decision affecting other Bangladeshis in the Gulf nation, the labour counsellors said.

He said the issues that ignited the protests have largely been solved in most cases but some workers of a few companies are demanding written commitment on the part of their employers.

On Kuwait's decision not to renew residency permits for Bangladeshi workers on menial jobs, he said the embassy has not been informed of any such decision.

Meantime, various organisations on migrants' rights yesterday condemned the continued deportation, saying the move is a complete violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families.

"We call on the UN Human Rights Council to intervene to protect the rights of migrant workers in Kuwait," said an IMA Research Foundation statement.

The unjust detention and deportation of migrant workers they have been through, it said.

Probashi Manab Kalyan Foundation (PMKF) demanded compensation to the deported workers and called for diplomatic efforts to stop further expulsion.

BDR fair price

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and chickpea (chhola) on first 12-14 days in Ramadan last year due to disruption in supply.

Chief Procurement Officer Lt Col. Enayet told the news agency that they have already procured all Ramadan items, including date (khejur), chickpea (chhola), pulses, spices and soya bean oil, except rice as the food ministry imposed restriction on it.

Boucher

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about the successful completion of voter list and national ID card of over 80 million people in 11 months.

He repeated that general election would be held in December.

On food security, the head of the caretaker government said his government is doing its best at home to this end while efforts are on to procure wheat from international market.

He sought cooperation from the United States to ensure food security.

Appreciating Bangladesh's farmer's contribution, he said the farmers are the "biggest entrepreneurs".

The CA said his government has given top priority to the agriculture sector and allocated the highest amount in the current budget.

Regarding terrorism and counter-terrorism, the CA said Bangladesh is maintaining its tough stand against terrorism.

Chief Adviser's Press Secretary Syed Fahim Munaim, who was present at the meeting, briefed newsmen about the meeting.

Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury, foreign secretary, Bangladesh high commissioner to Sri Lanka and US Ambassador to Sri Lanka were also present at the meeting.

Engr Mosharraf

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wealth statement. On July 28 this year, the High Court (HC) granted him ad-interim bail for two months.

Sub-inspector and second officer of Joydevpur Police Station Nazmul Islam Khan told The Daily Star that the former minister was arrested again under section 16/2 of the EPR and that the AL leader is accused in five separate cases.

Gulshan police arrested the HRC Group chief around 2:30pm from in front of Dhaka Central jail gate shortly after he was released on bail.

Mir Rezaul Alam, deputy commissioner of Gulshan Zone, told The Daily Star that the police arrested him in a separate case but could not specify the case instantly.

Cantonment police, meanwhile, said although Sayeed Hossain was arrested by Gulshan police, he was taken under their custody for safety.

Earlier, the joint forces arrested Sayeed on July 18 under section 16/2 of the EPR for smuggling money out of the country and enjoying properties bought in other people's names. They later handed him over to Gulshan police.

Former BNP lawmaker Moazzem Hossain Alal, also general secretary of Jatiyatabadi Juba Dal, was released yesterday morning after an HC bench granted him bail last week.

Police first arrested Moazzem on February 8 under the EPR and twice later on April 23 at the Rangpur jail gate and on July 13 at the Dhaka Central jail gate when he came out of the jails on HC bail.

RIA: Massive plan

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provide the information sought.

Earlier, the Ministry of Information brought amendments to the Right to Information Ordinance 2008 following directives from the cabinet. The cabinet okayed the draft on June 18 with a few changes in wording, rewriting a few clauses, and merging some sections.

"The government is very keen to establish citizens' right to information before handing over power to an elected government in December," said the information secretary, adding that everything is moving forward fast since the government is very serious about it.

Once the act is promulgated, there will be widespread publicity of it in the media explaining the provisions and the procedure for applying for information, said a government official concerned. "At first all the units will be made aware of the importance of the act," the official added.

Government officers will be provided with copies of the act. There will also be training sessions for the officers, particularly for those who will be engaged in the process of disseminating information.

"Success of it depends on how the units and the officials respond to it," said a law ministry official, adding that proper implementation of the act will be necessary to ensure free flow of information.

"The more you will disseminate information among citizens, the more successful the initiative will be," he added.

The three-member proposed Information Commission, with a five-year tenure, will be the supreme authority for implementing RIA, the members of which will be appointed on contractual basis.

The president of the country will appoint the commissioners from a list of names to be proposed by a five-member nominating body to be headed by a judge of the Appellate Division of Supreme Court. One of the commissioners will be a woman.

"The commission will have enormous power for implementing the act," said Jamil Osman, adding that anybody found to be showing negligence in providing information will be dealt with iron hands.

Anyone found guilty of refusing to provide information or giving wrong information can be fined Tk 5,000, besides departmental actions against the guilty.

An applicant may also go to the heads of government offices concerned for information. If not satisfied, the person will also have the right to go to the proposed high-powered Information Commission.

"Government officers found guilty of non-cooperation will be handed out punishments ranging from official rebuke to expulsion from job under the Disciplinary Appeal Rule 1985," said the information secretary. He however said the Information Commission will refer such matters to ministries concerned for investigation and for meting out punishments to guilty officers.

Sources said some information seekers however will face some difficulties in getting some information. A citizen who is a resident of a rural area will have easy access to local information, but for information about any other place or central units the person might have

to travel to district or divisional headquarters, or to the capital.

"It might be a bit troublesome for them," said a senior information ministry official. He said there will also be provisions barring disclosure of information regarding some specific matters involving the country's security and sovereignty.

"People will not be able to seek information about the National Security Intelligence (NSI), Directorate General of Forces Intelligence (DGFI), Special Branch (SB), the intelligence cell working under the National Board of Revenue (NBR), and about the international treaties signed with foreign countries by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs" the information ministry official said.

"There will also be a bar on disclosing information that might harm an individual, and on information about public examinations that is supposed to be classified," he informed The Daily Star.

A fee will be required, which might also discourage citizens from seeking information, said the official seeking anonymity while adding that the poor will be exempted from paying the fee, although determining 'poor' will be a problem.

The military backed caretaker government took the initiative to formulate the law with an aim to empower the people as well as to ensure transparency and accountability in governance, as part of its institutional reforms.

Earlier, the Ministry of Information prepared a draft, according to which the government and other institutions using public funds will have to provide the people with information they seek.

A total of 68 countries so far promulgated such acts allowing their citizens to learn about the activities of their governments, enhancing transparency and accountability in many of those countries.

Erosion

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The deputy commissioner, superintendent of police and WDB officials visited the spot and brought the situation under control by assuring the demonstrators of necessary measures in this regard.

When contacted, a senior official of the WDB said they could not understand the main reason of erosion earlier. But now they have confirmed that formation of these

has changed the course of the river near the town and upstream of the bridge, he added, seeking anonymity.

He admitted that had the shoals been removed by dredging the river in the dry season, the massive erosion now could have been averted. But it is very difficult to go for dredging now due to strong current.

Nizamul Haque Bhuiyan, WDB executive engineer, also admitted that shoals are obstructing river flow near the Jamuna bridge, causing massive erosion in the area. Besides, unplanned lifting of sand and earth at some points in the river has contributed to this.

He however said they are working hard to protect the vulnerable areas.

Local people said dumping of sand bags is just an eyewash, and they have demanded immediate dredging of main channel of the river.

Parul pays for no fault

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Unit of Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

Doctors operated on both her eyes Wednesday, Parul, lying on her hospital bed, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Parul's husband Hobi Talukder of Gachua of Shakhipur in Tangail claimed that his rivals hurled acid on them assuming that he was sleeping in the bed.

"I was away from home... our granddaughter was sharing the bed with my wife that night," Hobi told The Daily Star.

The perpetrators attacked around 2:00am when the two were sleeping in Hobi's mud hut. "Something liquid fell on me suddenly and it felt like it was burning on me," Parul told The Daily Star while describing the horror she experienced. She heard her granddaughter cry at the same time.

The acid burnt Parul's face, shoulders, arms and chest while Happy got burnt in her head and back.

"I jumped off the bed and ran out for help," she said. She claimed she saw three people—Chan Mia, Dhala Mia and Raisuddin—running away.

Parul and Happy were rushed to DMCH the same day. Happy was taken back to Tangail after treatment.

"I can hardly see now," Parul said lying in the DMCH Burn unit. Blaming his rival for the attack, her husband filed a case against Chan, Dhala and Raisuddin with Shakhipur Police Station.

The enemy brewed between Hobi and the local criminals over establishing supremacy at the local Deodighi bazaar. Hobi was the chief of labourers of the bazaar for several years until March this year.

"Chan and Dhala demanded Tk 1 lakh toll from labourers loyal to me. I collected Tk 50,000 from the labourers and gave it to them. But they later forced some labourers to pay Tk 1,000 each," Hobi said adding that the two also asked the labourers to pay 10 percent of their income to them.

He later filed an extortion case and Chan and Dhala were arrested and had to stay two months in jail before obtaining bail. Hobi claimed adding that they threatened of dire consequences a few days before hurling acid on his wife and granddaughter.

Chan and Dhala also filed a criminal case against Hobi, police sources said.

Kamrul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Shakhipur Police Station, told The Daily Star that they would take necessary steps after getting Parul's statement. The police are yet to arrest anyone in this connection.

"We are waiting for her to recover," the OC said.

The family sold all their belongings to send Faruq Talukder, one of their two sons, to Dubai nine months ago. They have already spent Tk 1 lakh for her treatment so far and had to borrow Tk 60,000 from locals.

"No one has come up with any kind of help," said Harun Talukder, the other son, describing the difficulties in which they are treating Parul.

Samanta Lal said it would take at least one month more before Parul can leave the hospital.

Fire in Indian train kills 32

PTI, AP, Hyderabad

At least 32 passengers were charred to death and many others injured when a fire broke out in a moving train in Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh early yesterday.

Local police official VC Sajjanar said the train caught fire early Friday roughly 208km north of Hyderabad, the capital of Andhra Pradesh.

The fire erupted in S-9 coach of the Secunderabad-Kakinada Gouthami Express at 0115 hours near Kesamudram station in the district, about 250km from Hyderabad, South Central Railway spokesman P Krishnaiah said.

Warangal district Superintendent of Police VC Sajjanar said 15 bodies have been found in the charred bogies and many more could be trapped inside.

Sajjanar said the fire appears to have been caused by a short circuit in the train's wiring. He said passengers pulled the chain to stop the train as soon as the fire broke out and passengers jumped out of the car.

The mishap occurred between Tallapadapalli and Mehboobabad stations when the passengers were fast asleep.

MONGLA PORT Berth Operating System starts amid protests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Berth Operating System (BOS) at Mongla Port was introduced yesterday amid protest as it marks the end of Mongla Dock Workers' Management Board.

Under the new system, stevedore agents or companies will appoint dock workers directly since Dock Workers' Management Board has been abolished. The Dock Workers' Management Board, an autonomous body under the Ministry of Shipping, failed to achieve expectations allegedly due to corruption, regionalism, frequent workers' strikes, violence at port, lack of security and politicisation of the port administration.

Security was tightened at vulnerable points and on jetties at Mongla Port yesterday fearing untoward incidents as workers who worked under Dock Workers' Management Board continued their sporadic protest at the port.

They demanded payment of their due wages and retirement and other financial benefits.

The jobless workers and their family members formed a human chain around 6:00am near the gang booking office. The law enforcement agencies dispersed them around 6:15am.

DMP Commissioner Naim Ahmed said tender has already been invited for necessary equipment. "We're hopeful that e-policing will start by November," he said, adding that the system will first be activated at city police stations.

"The C3S system would make traffic monitoring and crime control easier. It would also help to take decisions instantly," he told The Daily Star.

Deputy commissioner (DC) Masudur Rahman Bhuiyan, who went abroad to learn C3S and e-policing, said, "The C3S would allow us to detect criminals from captured footages."

Rapid Action Battalion, armed police, and intelligence agencies deployed a security blanket in the whole area to ensure security for the prominent member of Nehru-Gandhi family in India.

Talking to reporters at ZIA, Prof Yunus quoted Rahul as terming the visit a 'learning trip'.

"I was introduced to Rahul by his mother Congress President Sonia Gandhi at a function last year... He then expressed his interest in visiting Bangladesh," said Muhammad Yunus.

The 38-year-old member of Indian parliament representing Amethi constituency of Uttar Pradesh will learn first hand about different programmes of Brac including micro-finance, women's empowerment, community health, education, and legal and human rights protection in Gazipur today.

A notice of Bangladesh Press Information Department said Rahul Gandhi will visit Grameen Bank programmes in Shingair of Manikganj on Sunday.

The Congress general secretary will also visit Grameen Bank's head office in Mirpur of the capital on Monday and hold a meeting with bank officials.

Rahul Gandhi will leave Dhaka on Tuesday morning. In March 2004, Rahul announced his entry into politics and won a landslide victory in Lok Sabha elections the same year, contesting from his father's former constituency of Amethi.

The Nehru-Gandhi family has been involved in various microcredit projects in Amethi and Rae Bareilly parliamentary constituencies of Rahul and his mother Sonia respectively. His sister Priyanka Gandhi too has been promoting women's self-help groups in Amethi.

Saarc Summit

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The South Asian leaders will sign a Saarc Development Fund (SDF) charter with authorised capital of SDR one billion dollars and launch the South Asian Regional Standards Organisation (SARSO), headquarters of which will be established in Dhaka.

The summit leaders will sign the Convention on Mutual Legal Assistance in Criminal Matters to effectively deal with terrorists and criminals hiding in other Saarc countries.

At the inaugural session, the summit leaders will also focus on removal of non-tariff and para-tariff barriers to reduce trade imbalances in some member states and increase intra-Saarc trade.

They will also instruct the Saarc ministerial council comprising the commerce ministers of the member nations to start negotiation on trade in services under the umbrella agreement of Safta.

The summit will stress the need for making Saarc Food Bank operational immediately, increase food production and for collective efforts to produce alternative sources of energy, so vital for overall development in the region.

"The recent price hike of food globally has reminded us of urgent need to address the situation comprehensively. The food crisis has affected the poorest segment of the society. Food security will constitute an important area of our collective endeavours," Foreign Adviser Iftekhar Ahmed Chowdhury told UNB ahead of the summit.

He said that Saarc Food Bank need to be made operational immediately to give a human face to the organisation's work. "We need another Green Revolution based on technology and innovative techniques."

Apart from food, fuel and trade issues, critical issue of climate change, water resources, transport, social issues, terrorism, women empowerment and cooperation in science and technology will dominate the

summit talks.

At the inaugural session today, Saarc chairmanship will be handed over to Sri Lanka from India. Eight Saarc leaders will then make their country state-ments.

On the second day, Saarc leaders will go for retreat when they will seize the opportunity to discuss more on burning issues that hit the region hard.

The 15th summit will conclude through the issuance of the Colombo Declaration and statement on food security.

Meanwhile, capital Colombo has been tastefully decorated with portraits of eight Saarc leaders and flags of the member states.

Thousands of army, commandos and special police equipped with automatic weapons spread over the entire city. Sandbag bunkers have been set up in close proximity. People's movement has been heavily restricted.

Everything however would depend on the interim administration's decisions in light of the ground realities, she noted.

Blears, who earlier wrapped up her two-day visit, said, "It is important to press the government to lift the emergency, but I would not say that a free and fair election is simply ruled out because you have got a state of emergency."

She said both the chief adviser and the adviser for home affairs have assured her that the national election would be held by the year-end. "I believe it's a genuine commitment towards transition to a democratic government."

A member of parliament (MP) from Labour, she observed that there have to be an atmosphere appropriate for all to campaign and cast their votes fearlessly.

She said her country encourages all sides here to engage constructively in the process of transition to democracy this year.

On human rights, she said it is very important that people are treated in accordance with the rule of law and their human rights are respected.

Our correspondent from Sylhet adds: The British minister expressed hope for a stable democracy in Bangladesh in near future.

She was addressing a gathering of Bangladesh expatriates in the UK and local elites at the Sylhet Circuit House yesterday morning.

She said, "The Bangladesh community in the UK has long been playing a laudable role in the British society. We are proud of their contribution in economy, industries and various other sectors."

These people, she added, are also making great contributions to making Bangladesh a prosperous country.

British High Commissioner in Dhaka Stephan Evans and other high officials accompanied Blears in her visit to Sylhet.

AL may change

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polls. It is the people, not the invisible forces, who are to give their verdict in the election," AL Presidium Member Suranjit Sengupta told The Daily Star.

He urged all 'visible and invisible' forces not to interfere in the polls, and let the people cast their votes independently. He said the Election Commission (EC) has assured them of looking into the matter.

Sources said the AL might go tough on holding of upazila poll in October if it finds proofs of 'invisible interference', and formally brought the matter to the notice of the EC on Wednesday. HM Ershad-led Jatitya Party (JP) might also follow the AL decision.

Four AL teams comprised of senior leaders would closely monitor the elections in the four cities—Barisal, Khulna, Rajshahi and Sylhet—and submit a comprehensive report later. The report would be made public through a press conference soon afterwards.

Edible oil

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On the kitchen markets during this period.

Karwan Bazar retailer Abdul Hannan said a 5-litre jerrycan of Rupchanda soya bean oil was selling at Tk 611 yesterday.

Coarse-rice prices came down by Tk 30-40 per maund (37.32 kg) on the wholesale market in the last three days. Tri variety was selling at Tk 1170-1180 a maund yesterday, a drop from Tk 1210 three days back.

The price of mid-quality BR-28 rice fell by Tk 40 per maund, now selling at Tk 1290. A maund of Paria also dropped by Tk 20 in the last three days.

The price fall, however, did not impact on the retail market as of yesterday.

Our Chittagong correspondent reports: prices of palm oil marked a sharp fall on the retail market in the port city in the last one week.

Wholesalers said the prices would have come down more had not some importers increased the prices by Tk 200-300 per maund.

Palm oil prices dropped by Tk 6-8 per litre at retail outlets in the last one week.

Retail price of soya bean remained stable at Tk 116 in the same period.

Reconciliation move

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organisation to do well in the upcoming national election.

Now that Bhuiyan and his group are ready to cancel all the decisions they have taken since the chairperson's arrest, I think the secretary general will give his consent to having them back into the fold," a pro-Khaled leader told The Daily Star yesterday, wishing not to be named.

Mannan Bhuiyan, who emerged as a pro-reform stalwart after the changeover of January 11 last year, came out on bail Wednesday. Talking to newsmen after release, he said there is no alternative to uniting the party to succeed in election.

Like him, BNP standing committee member M Shamsul Islam and Vice-President MK Anwar were also released last week on ad-interim bail from the High Court.

Party sources said most of the senior leaders favour acting immediately to resolve the differences and have a united BNP. Even Khaleda Zia on several occasions has sent messages asking the party leaders to forge unity