

High hopes pinned

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bilateral ties amidst indications that New Delhi is willing to "travel extra mile" by taking some non-reciprocal steps in various fields including reducing tariff barrier.

"We feel Prime Minister Hasina's visit will be a landmark event in our bilateral relations, taking this relationship to an even higher level", Indian Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said in an interview to "Outlook" magazine published in its latest issue yesterday.

A diplomatic source in New Delhi said India sees Hasina's visit as a "significant opportunity" to forge a "new relationship" with Bangladesh, and is willing to walk the extra mile to reach out to the government in Dhaka.

The premier's official entourage includes Dipu Moni, Water Resources Minister Ramesh Chandra Sen, PM's Advisers HT Imam, Mashihur Rahman and Gower Rizvi and secretaries of several ministries concerned. Besides, a high-level business delegation will accompany her as a sign of Bangladesh's willingness to expand trade with its economically excellent neighbour.

Meanwhile, the Indian capital is being spruced up for the Bangladesh PM's visit. A special flight of Biman Bangladesh Airlines carrying Hasina and her entourage is scheduled to take off from Zia International Airport at 6:00pm to land at Palam Air Force Base in New Delhi.

Unprecedented security measures are also in place in New Delhi, particularly in Chanakyapuri area. Additional police and paramilitary forces have been deployed in and around the places to be visited by Hasina and her entourage during their stay in the Indian capital.

Hasina will be lodged in the presidential Chandragupta suite at the super luxury Maurya Sheraton Hotel, famous for accommodating the then US presidents Bill Clinton and George W Bush, and other world dignitaries during their visit to India. The then Bangladesh prime minister Khaleda Zia also stayed in the same suite during her India visit in March 2006.

The Chandragupta suite with its décor spreading over 2,500 square feet is reminiscent of the Maurya period of the third century BC.

Hasina will be accorded a ceremonial reception at Rashtrapati Bhavan in the Indian capital at 9:00am tomorrow. She will be given a 21-gun salute and a guard of honour in the forecourt of official residence of the Indian president. Horse-mounted Indian Presidential Guards will escort her at the time.

Three agreements and a few memorandums of understanding (MoUs) will be signed after the formal delegation level talks between the two countries led by Sheikh Hasina and her Indian coun-

terpart Manmohan Singh at Hyderabad House tomorrow evening.

Reports from New Delhi said Maurya Sheraton, where Hasina and her entourage will stay, has been turned into a fortress with the Special Security Force (SSF) of Bangladesh and Indian elite National Security Guard (NSG) screening every visitor. Hotel employees have been issued special passes.

Delhi police will man the outer ring of multi-layer security arrangement. India's Intelligence Bureau will be in charge of the second ring while the inner cordon will be left to the SSF and NSG. Delhi police will install barricades to check vehicles on the roads to be used by the prime minister's motorcade.

Our correspondent from New Delhi adds: Ahead of Sheikh Hasina's visit here, Indian cabinet yesterday approved two bilateral agreements on mutual legal assistance in criminal matters and on combating international terrorism, organised crime and illicit drug trafficking.

Presided by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, the meeting also okayed a MoU on sharing of power between the two countries, official sources said.

The Cabinet had earlier approved an agreement on transfer of sentenced persons, which will be signed tomorrow after talks between Hasina and Singh.

The two countries will also sign an MoU on cooperation in the power sector for import and export of electricity to the tune of over 900 million units per annum depending on availability, need and price, official sources said.

All the agreements will be signed after Hasina holds talks with Singh here tomorrow in the evening.

The price and various modalities for exchange of power will be worked out later for the MoU under which about 250MW is expected to be exchanged initially and eventually it could touch 1,000MW.

Energy-deficient Bangladesh will receive the power from Indian grids in West Bengal and Tripura.

Cherie Blair

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standing against violence and discrimination against women.

Later, Cherie conferred Cherie Blair Fellowship to 10 students of superior academic ability and outstanding leadership skills.

Rokeya Afzal Rahman, chairman of AUW Support Foundation Bangladesh Board of Directors and former adviser to a caretaker government, Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury, former commerce minister, Kamal Hossain, chief executive officer of AUW Bangladesh, among others, were present on the occasion.

WC trophy

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Although India and Sri Lanka have previously hosted the one-day championship event that takes place every four years, it is something special for Bangladesh to be a co-host of a sporting extravaganza for the first time.

Bangladesh is also the proud hosts of the February 17 opening ceremony apart from staging eight matches including two quarter-finals.

"2011 will be a special year for us as we will be a part of the biggest sporting event. It will be long and obviously it will be bumpy. But let me assure you we shall deliver in its right earnest," said a confident Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) president AHM Mustafa Kamal during the gala launching.

Pawar, who will take over the ICC presidency when the World Cup kicks off in February next year, was also optimistic about Bangladesh's abilities to host an event of this magnitude.

"When we talk about the Asian sub-continent it will not be complete without Bangladesh," said Pawar adding that Bangladesh has come a long way as a cricketing nation both on and off the field with the biggest passion driving them.

The programme also featured a brief documentary on Bangladesh cricket highlighting some significant events.

Delwar

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Syed Ashraf, also LGRD minister, told a roundtable discussion on Friday that the then Pakistani president Pervez Musharraf held an hour-long meeting with Ulfa leader Anup Chetia at a city hotel while visiting Dhaka during the BNP-Jamaat rule.

Chetia, leader of the Indian separatist group, has long been detained in Bangladesh.

Three convicts

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gave the five convicts seven days' time to turn in mercy petitions.

Meanwhile, Abdullah Al Mamun, lawyer for Bazul Huda and AKM Mohiuddin, yesterday told The Daily Star that he and the relatives of his clients did not know about the mercy petitions being filed.

The defence will file review petitions with the Supreme Court by January 19 deadline, he added.

Those who attended the press briefing included Additional IG (prisons) Col Syed Iftakher Uddin, DIG (prisons) Golam Hyder and Senior Jail Superintendent Tawhidul Islam of Dhaka Central Jail.

Rockets hit

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officials say, with many to be based in provincial cities such as Herat as well as on military bases across the country.

Meanwhile, Britain's military may hand control of parts of Afghanistan's Taliban-invested Helmand province to their US counterparts, the Times reported Saturday citing unnamed military officials.

The newspaper said that with the arrival of more US marines in Afghanistan and the implementation of a new US counter-insurgency strategy, British troops might pull out of the upper Helmand valley and concentrate on the biggest population centre around Lashkar Gah.

It cited military officials as saying British commanders were ready to pull out of Musa Qala and Kajaki, home to a hydroelectric power station to which they brought a turbine in an operation in 2008.

Handing over the two districts to US troops would free up roughly 1,100 troops to patrol the centre of Helmand province, which was the initial strategy when British soldiers were first deployed there in 2006, said the Times.

However, the newspaper said there is resistance to leaving Sangin, the district that has claimed the highest number of British casualties.

The newspaper said cabinet officials have been briefed about the Helmand plans, and a decision was expected within six weeks.

Depending on the availability of US troops, the redeployment of British forces could take place in the spring, it added.

Britain has nearly 10,000 troops in Helmand province as part of the international coalition battling Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan.

A total of 108 British service personnel died in Afghanistan last year, the bloodiest for the British military since the 1982 Falklands War. A total of 246 have been killed since operations began in 2001.

Mistrust must

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FBCCI president Yousuf Abdullah Harun in his paper on Bangladesh-India Economic Relations highlighted the causes hampering Bangladesh's trade and investment.

"Although Bangladesh and India are situated in a region endowed with vast resources, in reality they could not convert these resources into productive and collective wealth in an accelerating manner. The trade intensity indicates that there is scope for mutual trade and cooperation," he mentioned.

He expressed the hope the premier's visit would resolve all the problems as it would create goodwill on both sides, setting the stage for a comprehensive understanding on various issues of mutual interest.

Bangladesh must seize this opportunity for closer economic relations with India in order to realise its fullest potentials, he added.

Transport sector expert Dr Rahmatullah placed a paper on Bangladesh-India Relations: Regional Connectivity where he pointed out the important issue of improving connectivity in Bangladesh as well as in the region for diversity in trade, investment and development.

Termining the existing connectivity very poor, he said "non-cooperation" and "mistrust" between the two neighbouring countries are the main reason behind it.

He suggested that both the governments come out of the mindset of "mistrust". He also urged the government to invest in the Mongla, Chittagong and the proposed deep sea ports and also in the railway sector to grab the opportunity.

"If we develop our transport sector, there will be huge foreign trade and investment in the country."

Vice-president of Bangladesh Enterprise Institute (BEI) former ambassador M Afsarul Quader presented a paper on Management of Bangladesh-India Border.

He suggested resolving the issues of killings on the border, maritime boundary and demarcating yet-to-be-demarcated 6.5 kilometres border. He also suggested proper implementation of the Mujib-Indira agreement of 1974.

Addressing the roundtable as the chief guest, Foreign Minister Dipu Moni said water related matters are not only very important for the country but also vitally linked to the life, livelihood and economic wellbeing of Bangladesh.

"Unfortunately, following the Ganges Water Treaty, we haven't been able to make further progress on most of our water related concerns, especially sharing waters of other common rivers including the Teesta," she said.

She added dependence of Bangladesh on the waters of Ganges and other common rivers remains an ever-present reminder of the umbilical links between Bangladesh and India.

"Since formation of the present government, our relations with the neighbouring countries received added momentum. The time has given us a unique opportunity as all the South Asian countries are having democratic governments in office. This is the context which has created ground for exploring new

horizons in our bilateral relations with India. Our sentiments and goodwill were reciprocated by the Indian leadership," she said.

On trade, she said, "We must act urgently to fully activate all institutional mechanism at our disposal to promote two-way trade between the two countries, remove avoidable hindrances, initiate long-pending trade facilitation measures and ease movement of businesspersons and professionals."

The foreign minister believes the premier's visit would enable building on the already solid foundation of the existing friendly relations with India.

The roundtable was addressed, among others, by Prof Syed Anwar Hossain, former chief Lt Gen Harun-Ar-Rashid, former adviser to caretaker government Shafi Sami, former police chief Nurul Huda, Maj Gen (ret'd) Syed Muhammad Ibrahim, Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) Executive Director Dr Iftakharuzzaman, former FBCCI president Mir Nasir Hossain, former commerce secretary Sohel Ahmed Chowdhury and columnist Jagul Ahmed Chowdhury.

AL failed

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extra forces at the institute. But the attack on Moitree leaders was pre-planned and some of our men received injuries while trying to resist them," said another police official.

Contacted, Rajshahi city unit Awami League acting general secretary Shafiqur Rahman Badsha acknowledged being warned by the law enforcers and said, "Even before police told us anything, we ourselves were aware of Chhatra League's internecine feuds and also its feud with Moitree over trivial issues."

He categorically mentioned the name of Chhatra League Polytechnic Institute president Nizam Uddin, the main accused in Sunny murder case, and said, "Sunny murder is not political; it was resulted from Nizam's personal enmity with Moitree president Jewel."

Rajshahi city Chhatra League president Abdul Momin said, "Actions against the Chhatra League men were delayed, as we were looking into an allegation against Moitree. The allegation is they recruited several former Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal activists in its student front who had beaten our men in the past."

Rajshahi Polytechnic Institute unit Moitree president Kazi Abdul Mottaleb Jewel was blamed for beating up Nizam and two other Chhatra League activists and damaging Nizam's newly purchased motorcycle on the campus on November 1.

Talking to The Daily Star, Rajshahi Polytechnic Institute Vice-principal Moazzem Hossain said they could not anticipate anything. "We will form a probe committee to look into the matter and punish the culprits after the institute reopens," he said.

Meanwhile, Workers' Party and its students wing Chhatra Moitree held a protest rally in the city last evening and demanded immediate arrest of the killers of Sunny.

Bangabandhu

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people of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan).

The Pakistan junta later sent Bangabandhu -- who led our war of liberation and struggled for independence -- to Pakistan (then West Pakistan) and imprisoned him.

After the nation achieved victory over Pakistan on December 16, 1971 through a nine-month-long Liberation War, the then junta of Pakistan was compelled to free Bangabandhu -- the icon of Bangladesh's struggle for independence.

To observe the day, different organisations and political parties including Awami League and its associate organisations have drawn up elaborate programmes.

The programmes include hoisting of national and party flags at the central office of the party, Bangabandhu Bhaban and party offices across the country at 7:00am.

At 7:30am, leaders of AL and its associate organisations -- Bangabandhu Research Centre, Bangali Foundation and various other organisations -- would place wreaths at the portrait of Bangabandhu at the Bangabandhu Memorial Museum on Road 32 at Dhanmondi.

Robber killed in 'crossfire'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

An alleged robber was killed in a "shootout" between his cohorts and police yesterday morning at Rupnagar of Pallabi in the capital.

The dead, Appel Mahmud Suman, 26, was identified by his brother Asaduzzaman Hira at Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue. He was a resident of Rupnagar's Tin Shed Colony.

Police, however, named him as Alamgir.

Officer-in-Charge of Pallabi Police Station Iqbal Hossain told The Daily Star that following an attempt around 12:30midnight to break into a four-storey under-construction building at C block of Eastern Housing 2nd phase, locals chased a gang of five to six robbers. A team of patrol police joined in the chase.

The robbers fired on the police while they were scaling the boundary wall of Botanical Garden to flee, the OC said. Suman came in the line of fire when the police team fired back. He received two bullets in his legs while other gang members managed to flee.

The locals gave him a good beating after the incident, said the OC.

Suman was admitted to Pangu Hospital at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar where he died around 5:00am. His body was later sent to DMCH morgue for autopsy.

Security guard of the building Faruk Hossain gave statements that contradict the description of the incident given by the police.

He told The Daily Star that he caught Suman red-handed while he attempted to steal inside the building, and handed him over to the patrol police around 12:30am.

"After 20 minutes, I heard sounds of firing," Faruk added.

Raqibul Islam, a construction labour of the building, said the labours were sleeping on the first floor when suddenly he woke up to see a man trying to take away his mobile phone. While he screamed, the security guard came running and caught the man.

Morgue sources said apart from bullet injuries, the body bore several marks of torture.

Suman's brother Hira said Suman disappeared on Friday night after he went out with some of his friends.

Allowance

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He emphasised the need for awareness among people in the society and the families so that the old members can get due respect and care.

Besides, he advised the leaders of the organisation to place their demands to the ministries so that the government can provide them with land and other facilities for the rehabilitation of the aged people.

The gathering was presided over by Lelini Chowdhury, Prof Zillur Rahman Siddiqui, Prof Rashid-E Mahbub, columnists Ajoy Roy, Morshed Ali and Khondker Ibrahim Khaled, General Secretary of Bangladesh Asiatic Society Mahfuz Khanam, and Shahid Dr Milan's mother Selina Aktar, among others, spoke at the meeting.

The speakers urged the government and the nongovernmental organisations to provide some jobs for the old people so that they can pass their time well.

They also urged the young family members to give importance and honour to the aged members so that they stop feeling helpless.

Hasina

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war of Bangladesh, at Shakti Sthal for wreath-laying at 1015 hours, as per the official programme released by the Indian external affairs ministry.

Fifteen minutes later, the visiting premier will travel to the memorial of Indira Gandhi's son Rajiv Gandhi, another former prime minister, at Veer Bhumi to offer floral tribute.

All the three memorials, set in idyllic lush green surroundings, are located along Delhi's Ring Road on the bank of Jamuna River.

Indira Gandhi was assassinated by her bodyguards here on October 31, 1984 and Rajiv Gandhi was killed in a suicide bomb blast by an LTTE activist at Sriperambudur on May 30, 1990.

On January 11, Hasina will place a wreath on the memorial of India's Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi, at Raj Ghat at 1030 hours after her ceremonial reception at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

On the same day, the visiting premier will meet Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi, another member of Nehru-Gandhi clan, at the latter's official residence at 1630 hours.

India accuses Pakistan of rocket firing

Afp, Ani, Amritsar

Indian frontier troops yesterday accused their Pakistani counterparts of firing at least six rockets across the border into northern Punjab but said there were no casualties.

The incident is the second since September when two rockets allegedly fired by Pakistani troops landed near the popular tourist attraction of Wagah in Indian Punjab.

Border Security Force (BSF) officials said two of the cross-border rockets exploded in farms on the Indian side while the remaining two did not detonate.

Two of the rockets landed in Border Security Force post (Khangarh), about two kilometres from the international Indo-Pak border.

"No casualty has been reported," a BSF official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In retaliation, Border Security Force also opened fire with machine gun and mortar fire towards Pakistan and also registered its protest over the rocket shelling incident with Pakistani rangers during the flag meeting.

"At night around 12.00 to 12.15 from Pakistan side around 5-6 rockets were fired. Out of which two fell near the BOP (Border Out Post). And sounds of two-three more explosions were heard. The rockets, which fell near BOP, did not explode and there have been no reports of damage to any human life or property," said Himmat Singh, the Inspector General (Frontier), Border Security Force, Punjab.

"At night itself we convened a flag meeting of commandant level with Pakistan Rangers in which we strongly protested against the incident. We have urged that they should strongly stop such attacks from their area. They raised objection that our force targeted their BOP and fired bomb on it, after this we have given them strict warnings that if such an incident is repeated then strong

action will be taken by the border security force," Singh further informed.

Frontier commanders from both sides met to discuss the alleged shelling, he said in the Sikh pilgrimage city of Amritsar.

There was no immediate comment available from Islamabad but the BSF official said Pakistani commanders at the meeting denied firing the rockets.

The Indian army meanwhile claimed cross-border firing at Kashmir's disputed borders early Saturday and said it occurred during an unsuccessful attempt by alleged Pakistani militants to sneak into Indian territory.

"There was firing by the Pakistanis before the militants tried to breach fencing along our borders," army major general Surendra Nath said in Jammu, Indian Kashmir's winter capital.

Nath said Indian soldiers foiled the infiltration bid.

The BSF in Kashmir claimed a rocket was also fired from Pakistan into the Indian zone of the divided Himalayan region.

There were no casualties, officials said, adding that a high security alert was sounded following the failed infiltration attempt.

Tension between the two neighbours flared in the wake of the Mumbai attacks in November 2008, which India blamed on Pakistan-based militants and "official agencies" of Pakistan, a charge Islamabad has denied.

BSF kills 2

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Benapole adds, Hazrat Ali, 30, was beaten to death by BSF on Goga border in Benapole yesterday.

BDR and locals said BSF caught Hazrat Ali and beat him to death when he was returning from India in the morning.

Bongaon police of India recovered the body and sent it to the morgue of a local hospital.

Nigerian suspect

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said he understood the six charges against him.

His court-appointed lawyer, Miriam Siefer, entered the plea of not guilty to all six charges, including attempted murder of 290 people on board the plane and trying to use a weapon of mass destruction. He faces life imprisonment if convicted.

"At this time our client would like to enter a plea of not guilty," Siefer said, but added "we have -- with our client's consent -- consented to detention."

Abdulmutallab, son of a prominent Nigerian banker, was arrested after the botched al-Qaeda plot, in which explosives allegedly stitched into his underwear failed to detonate aboard a Northwest flight from Amsterdam to Detroit.

He was badly burned when the device sparked a fire. Asked if he had taken any medication in the past 24 hours, he said "Yes. Painkillers," holding his left hip.

It was not US intelligence that thwarted the attack, but passengers and crew, who tackled and restrained Abdulmutallab before he was escorted off the plane.

The foiled bombing triggered global alarm, leading the United States to adopt stringent new screening and security measures at airports around the world. Dozens of names have also been added to no-fly lists.

President Barack Obama on Thursday ordered a sweeping overhaul of flawed intelligence services, which he has blamed for missing red flags that could have detected the plot.

Probes revealed that US analysts knew Abdulmutallab was an extremist and that al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula was plotting an attack, but did not connect the dots.

Legal experts believe this case is going to take months to come to a conclusion.

"There are so many agencies -- with initials you know and initials you don't -- involved in a case that transcends territorial boundaries," said attorney James Thomas, who represented one of four North African immigrants in a 2003 terror trial in Detroit.

Jyoti Basu

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retention, and there has been a drop in urine output. He is also feeling drowsy. This signifies involvement of multiple organs," the bulletin said.

The former West Bengal chief minister was admitted to the hospital near his Salt Lake residence Jan 1 following chest congestion and infection. The Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) leader was put on ventilator support early Jan 6 after an acuter respiratory problem.

"He is still on partial ventilation. All adequate measures are being taken by the medical team," said the bulletin.

Hospital executive director D.N. Agarwal, who read out the bulletin, said the board will again examine the critically ill leader in the evening.

An attending doctor said Basu has an irregular heartbeat. He was being given liquid food.

A bronchoscopy done on Basu has revealed that the pneumonia attack was aggravated by some highly drug-resistant bacteria strains.

Doctors were now awaiting the drug sensitivity report of his lung fluid culture test. 'Once we receive the report Saturday, we will zero in on a particular antibiotic,' said the doctor.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the hospital Thursday and has been monitoring the health condition of the veteran leader.

Following an offer from the prime minister to arrange for specialists, the medical board held a tele-conference with experts from the country's premier All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) Friday.

Basu holds the record for the longest 23-year old stint as chief minister from June 1977 to November 2000. He stepped down voluntarily on health grounds.

Dhaka, Yangon

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principle, shifted from its rigid position on equidistance," Rear Admiral (ret'd) Khurshed Alam told The Daily Star.

But how will the two countries amicably accommodate the two concepts? Khurshed explains that the maritime boundary will be set on the basis of equidistance at some parts and on equity at others.

"We will have to see how this formula will work," he added.

The dispute between the two neighbouring countries surfaced during the last caretaker government's rule in late 2008 when Bangladesh protested against Myanmar's move for oil and gas exploration in a block in the deep sea.

Bangladesh claimed that the area belonged to it.

A tension has ever since prevailed between the two countries.

Later, Bangladesh formally raised the issue at the UN Arbitration Tribunal in October last year for a solution.

Two 13-member teams from both the countries participated in the just-concluded meeting.

Myanmar Deputy Foreign Minister U Maung Myint led the Myanmar delegation.

Bangladesh Ambassador in Myanmar Maj Gen Anup Kumar Chakma and Myanmar Ambassador in Bangladesh U Phae Than Oo were also present at the meeting.

The Bangladesh delegation included Sector General (Administration) Mohammad Abdul Hye and five high officials of the foreign ministry and representatives from Hydrography and Naval Operations of Bangladesh Navy, Bangladesh Geological Survey, Petrobangla, and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority.

The Myanmar team comprised representatives from the ministries of defence and education, Consular and Legal Affairs Department, Myanmar National Hydrographic Centre, State Peace and Development Council, Legal Expert Group and the Law Department of University of Yangon.

As per UNCLOS, Bangladesh needs to file its claims for maritime boundary with the International Seabed Authorities and must demarcate its boundaries by July 27, 2011. India was supposed to do this by June 29, 2009 and Myanmar by May 21, 2009.

Under the convention, Bangladesh has to submit necessary documents to the