

Ball is now

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the face of India's decline to agree on water-sharing issue," said noted economist ProfWahiduddin Mahmud.

He said one positive outcome of this unfortunate episode is the renewed recognition of the real point of trade-off in Bangladesh's negotiations with India.

"India's main interest is in securing transit facilities and our vital interest lies in water-sharing agreements for the common rivers. We cannot build a genuinely win-win framework of cooperation without dealing with the two issues simultaneously," observed Prof Mahmud.

Prof Amena Mohsin, faculty member of international relationship department at Dhaka University, said the ball is now in India's court to resolve the dispute.

"Transit is our trump card and we have created a positive public opinion that transit to India will benefit both the countries," said Mohsin, adding, "Once giving transit to India was commonly opposed in Bangladesh."

She said the Indian government, its intellectuals and media have to make the West Bengal and northeastern states understand the positive outcome of transit, connectivity and water-sharing.

In the two-day summit between Bangladesh and India that concluded yesterday, the prime ministers could not yield much for their countries despite a lot of hype. The outcome of the summit was shadowed by the failure in inking a deal on sharing river waters.

"Bangladesh has shown its goodwill. Now India has to step up and make its opposing states understand the potential economic benefits of connectivity and water-sharing," said Prof Mustafizur Rahman, executive director of Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD).

Rahman however feels the government should open fresh talks with India and the West Bengal government as well to understand their concerns.

Akbar Ali Khan, former finance adviser to the caretaker government, said it was unfair that both the countries wanted to resolve many complicated issues in a single visit. Every issue is quite problematic and demands detailed discussions.

Mohammad Yunus, senior research fellow of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies said transit is an economic issue and India will be more benefited from it than Bangladesh.

"The chief ministers of Indian northeastern states should press the central government as well as West Bengal to resolve the water-sharing dispute with us," he said. Yunus hoped India will take positive initiative considering its own gain.

Prof Wahiduddin Mahmud urged the government to focus on how the system works in India while improving our negotiation skills.

Dhaka, Delhi

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New Delhi blast poured in.

The Indian premier said such forces "sap the strength of our societies, threaten our state systems and impede our progress".

"It is, therefore, of paramount importance that we work together to confront this challenge," he added.

The Indian leader praised Bangladesh's initiatives to fight terrorism and work together with India to crush the militant forces.

"I would like to acknowledge the immense cooperation India has received from Bangladesh in this area, which is in the interest of both India and Bangladesh," he said.

Meanwhile, in an instant official reaction after the blast Manmohan promised not to succumb to the pressure of terrorism.

"This is a long war in which all political parties, all the people of India have to stand united so that the scourge of terrorism is crushed," read a statement issued by the Indian premier's office.

11 killed

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The Bangladesh government banned Huji and its activities in 2005.

In the email to the NIA, the group also called on India to repeal the death sentence of a man convicted in connection with an attack on the Indian parliament in 2001 who was awaiting execution by hanging, reports Reuters.

The bomb dug a crater three to four feet deep near the main reception counter where passes are issued for lawyers and visitors to enter the sandstone building before the main security checkpoint.

"I was near the gate at that time," said lawyer KK Gautam. "There was an orderly queue when a loud blast occurred. I saw many injured and dead. I saw 20-25 injured and around 10 dead."

Lawyers in black suits and starched white collars stood around shocked on one of the busiest days of the week when the court hears public interest petitions.

About 120 soldiers, police and bomb squad specialists were at the scene, with ambulances whisking the injured away to hospitals.

Television images showed scores of lawyers running from one of the main gates of the building just after the explosion. Police cordoned off the

PM calls

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development of the South Asian region and we would have to make united efforts to eliminate it," Hasina said when chief ministers of four eastern Indian states called on her at her Ganobhaban residence.

The chief ministers are Tarun Gogoi of Assam, Mukul Sangma of Meghalaya, Lal Thanhawla of Mizoram, and Manik Sarkar of Tripura.

Briefing newsmen after the meeting, PM's Press Secretary Abul Kalam Azad said during the call on, they discussed matters of bilateral and regional interests.

Hasina laid emphasis on the joint initiative by Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Bhutan for promotion of the tourism sector in the region. "The joint initiative would bring immense benefit for all the countries of the region," she observed.

The premier said her government has been working relentlessly with honesty and sincerity for changing the lot of the people. "Our main aim is to ensure the economic emancipation of people by changing their lot."

Hasina also highlighted various steps including river dredging that her government has already under-

area, not far from parliament and the prime minister's office.

"I think I saw this guy (suspect). He was in white, aged 34 or 35, carrying a briefcase and jumping the long queue," a middle-aged man told Indian television channels.

"There must have been some 80 people at that time when the bomb went off. I crouched immediately but the man behind me, he did not and was hit (by shrapnel) to his right arm," he said.

Two lawyers at the court, Namita Roy, 48, and Hargovina Jah, 40, told Reuters the scanner and metal detector at Gate 5 of the court where the blast occurred were not working.

"This is definitely a big security lapse on the part of the police. For example, yesterday even the (body) scanner was not working. The security, more or less, is very weak, especially in view of the blast that happened a few months ago," said Roy.

The blast comes as security has been stepped up at key locations as parliament is in session and ahead of the anniversary of the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States.

It also comes less than two months after near-simultaneous triple bomb attacks in India's financial hub Mumbai killed 24.

taken for development of the country.

The Indian chief ministers highly praised the visionary and dynamic leadership of Bangladesh premier in advancing the country towards progress and development.

They also lauded Hasina for her initiatives towards strengthening ties between the two neighbours, saying that it has added a new dimension to the friendship between Bangladesh and India.

A new avenue of friendship and cooperation has opened up between the two countries through Hasina's visit to India last year and the Indian premier's tour to Bangladesh, they said.

The chief ministers of the four eastern Indian states eulogized the introduction of border haats, saying these would contribute to building mutual trust among the people of the two countries side by side with reducing cross-border crimes.

They highly praised warm hospitality the Bangladesh government provided during their visit.

PM's Principal Secretary MA Karim, Bangladesh High Commissioner to India Tariq A Karim were present on the occasion.

Khaleda shares

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Vice Chairman of BNP Shamsur Mobin Chowdhury said this while briefing journalists after a meeting between Khaleda and Manmohan at his hotel suite in Dhaka.

Shamsur Mobin, acting Secretary General of the party Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and chairperson's advisers Reaz Rahman and Sabihuddin Ahmed accompanied her at the meeting that lasted 25 minutes.

"The Indian prime minister regretted [the failure to sign water-sharing deals] and assured the BNP chairperson that the river water issues will be settled soon on a priority basis through discussion. He [Manmohan] said he had already asked all officials concerned to work for the water-sharing deal," Shamsur Mobin said.

"BNP always wants to maintain warm relations with India. But all the deals must be signed on the basis of equity, and special attention has to be given to sensitive issues. We expected deals on water-sharing of common rivers," he quoted the leader of the opposition in parliament saying at the meeting.

She also said, "Killing at

border must be stopped. Otherwise it will create lack of confidence."

Manmohan termed Khaleda "one of the builders of modern Bangladesh" and hoped to work with major political parties including BNP for building good relations between the people of the two countries. He sought Khaleda's help in this regard, Mobin said.

On transit issue, Khaleda said they also want connectivity but it should be between Bangladesh and Southeast Asia, if necessary, also China. Manmohan agreed with her, Mobin added.

The BNP chairperson once again urged the Indian premier not to build Tipaimukh dam, and he said India will not do anything harmful to Bangladesh.

Khaleda appreciated India's giving duty-free access for 46 Bangladeshi products and hoped for more in future. This will contribute to enhancing bilateral relations, she said.

Manmohan applauded Khaleda's role in making the BNP effective, and said BNP's founder late president Ziaur Rahman will be remembered at the upcoming (Saarc) summit.

Italian tightens, speeds up austerity plans

AFP, Milan

The Italian government moved Tuesday to placate jittery markets by tightening measures in its latest austerity package and seeking a quick vote on the measures, as well as on a balanced budget amendment.

A cabinet meeting authorised calling a confidence vote on the 45.5-billion-euro (\$63.8-billion) austerity package, allowing to Senate to vote yesterday on the measures that should help stabilise the finances of the debt-laden eurozone country.

The government said "the seriousness of the international financial crisis" justified the rushed adoption of the measures, against which unions held a general strike on Tuesday.

Tens of thousands of workers took to the streets across Italy, shutting down parts of the public transportation system and major tourist attractions such as the Colosseum in Rome.

The final adoption of the austerity package had initially been set for mid-September.

However, the government has been forced to accelerate its adoption and back-track on changes to its provisions that had damaged its credibility among investors.

After Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi met with leaders of his ruling coalition on Tuesday they announced the package would again include a wealth tax and pension reforms and raise the VAT sales tax.

Nizami

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fugitives Paresh Barua and Nurul Amin to appear before the court within October 3.

India's Ulfat (United Liberation Front of Asom) leader Paresh Barua and former additional secretary of the industries ministry Nurul Amin are among the 11 newly charge-sheeted accused in two cases of arms haul.

The court fixed October 3 for the next hearing and ordered to submit the copies of advertisement on that day, said Additional Public Prosecutor Nazrul Islam Sentu.

Earlier, nine newly charge-sheeted accused including Nizami and former state minister for home Lutfozzaman Babar were produced before the court amid tight security. Their lawyers sought bail for them on grounds of sickness.

The court on June 29 issued arrest warrants against Paresh Barua and Nurul Amin and ordered attachment of their property.

Two police stations on August 7 submitted reports on the execution of arrest warrants against Nurul Amin while reports on Paresh Barua are yet to be submitted.

BNP saw

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greater army support for BNP, particularly from the rank of major and below.

Salauddin was of the opinion that the mutiny had significantly weakened the AL government that "was not acting like a party with 260 of the 300 seats in parliament, in a way that could show the leadership needed during a crisis."

When the army was very aggrieved, BNP thought that army support for the party had increased.

Initially, BNP pledged support for the AL-led government but it took a much more partisan stance on February 28, according to a cable. While its standing committee issued a statement urging patience, peace and unity, a separate statement from its office secretary blamed the government for making the situation "more complex."

It went on to say the government "could not take timely steps to prevent the killings of army officers and their family members" and the torture of women and children who lived on the BDR compound where the rebellion broke out.

Teesta failure unfortunate

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proved a big blow also to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina who wanted India to reciprocate her bold steps in addressing India's security concerns and its long-time request for transit through Bangladesh.

The Teesta crash brought down with it two other key deals: sharing the Feni river water and letting India use Chittagong and Mongla seaports to transport goods through Bangladesh territory.

Amid criticisms both in India and Bangladesh, Manmohan said, "I was hopeful that during this visit we would be able to come to an agreement on the sharing of the waters of the Teesta."

It is unclear how long it will take for the two countries to reach a new agreement on Teesta. However, Manmohan's remarks suggest that fresh negotiations will be needed to reach an agreement and Mamata's role will be crucial in making it successful.

Manmohan arrived in Dhaka on Tuesday becoming the first Indian head of government to visit Bangladesh in 12 years.

He said he asked his country's officials "to intensify their efforts towards finding a viable formula which does not cause undue distress to all those, in India or in Bangladesh, who are dependent on the flows of

the river".

Saying that water is a sensitive issue he, however, hoped that the two countries can agree on "cooperative arrangements based on the principles of equity, fair play, and no harm to either party".

He said Ganga Water Treaty signed in 1996 is one such example which has stood the test of time.

On Bangladesh's concern about Tipaimukh Dam project in India, he said, "I wish to make a public statement and make it clear that India will not take steps that will adversely affect Bangladesh."

"India will not, I repeat and assure you, India will not take steps that will adversely affect Bangladesh," he said.

In his 27-minute speech on "India, Bangladesh, and South Asia", Manmohan touched on border problems, extremism, tenets of Islam, and civil society.

He said both India and Bangladesh are vulnerable to the forces of extremism and terrorism, which threaten state systems, and impede social and economic progress.

"It is of paramount importance that we work together to confront this challenge."

Bangladesh, he said, has firmly rejected extremist ideas and achieved success as an open, moderate, and

Frustratingly different

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found meeting with journalists from their country, briefing them about the developments both off-record and on-record and thus keeping them updated.

India has a long-held practice of holding separate media briefings exclusively for Indians during regional or international conferences or VIP visits.

In contrast, Bangladeshi journalists find themselves chasing their country's officials to get information, papers or any sort of briefings.

Consider what happened yesterday after the two countries signed 10 MoUs and protocols following talks between Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina.

Interestingly, Bangladeshi officials suggested local journalists visit the Indian External Affairs Ministry (MEA) website to download details of the deals.

In such a situation, the local press always finds the MEA website is prompt and all necessary documents are available. Like in the past, the media in Bangladesh found all the statements/summary of all deals and full text of agreements and MoUs instantly on the MEA website. Even, the media used documents from the MEA for publication.

The "Digital Bangladesh" website of the foreign ministry offered a "coming soon" message for documents on the "Agreements, MOUs and Protocols signed between Bangladesh and India: 06 Sept, 2011", but coming soon continued till filling this report at 5:00pm yesterday. However, those were later uploaded in the foreign ministry website.

The government's apathy

to inform the media about what is going to happen with India was demonstrated all along. The media made their reports on the Indo-Bangladesh developments making their own efforts.

The only formal briefing from the government was done on September 4 by Foreign Minister Dipu Moni where her versions on what was going to happen did not reflect the reality. She had claimed that the signing of Teesta deal would definitely take place.

Even when Indian Foreign Secretary Ranjan Mathai on September 5 through a press briefing clearly indicated that the Teesta deal would not be possible this time, Dipu Moni at an informal briefing at the Ganobhaban at 10 pm on the same day claimed that the deal was on. She said the Indian foreign secretary had not explicitly said anything on cancelling the deal. She also said they were "constantly in touch with India" and had received no formal information that the deal would not be signed.

On such VVIP visits and major events, the Press Information Department (PID) coordinates the media on behalf of Bangladesh government. The PID was contacting the press accordingly till September 4, when officials personally contacted journalists and asked them to contact the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for covering the official talks.

The PMO allowed just one reporter for each media house. No photographer was allowed.

The PID usually arranged security passes for media to cover such major events, but this time no security pass was issued for reporters. Except allowing them for the signing of agreements and press statements by the two

vibrant society and democracy.

About border-related violence he said the two countries are working to reduce such incidents.

He called for greater cooperation between the border forces to ensure that illegal trans-border activities do not cast any shadow on bilateral relations.

Manmohan said India and Bangladesh have set up a joint Empowered Group to reduce travel times for passengers on the Maitree Express between Dhaka and Kolkata.

Speaking about commonality between the two countries, he said both the countries have been deeply influenced by the tenets of Islam, which teaches peace, compassion, and virtuous living.

"For centuries, our people have lived and worshipped together in harmony. Even today thousands of Indians and Bangladeshis from all creeds go to seek solace at the dargah in Ajmer Sharif," he said.

Dhaka University Vice-chancellor Prof AAMS Arefin Siddique, and Pro-vice-chancellor Prof Harun-or-Rashid also spoke on the occasion, which was largely attended by ministers, MPs, educationists, diplomats, members of the civil society, teachers, and students.

Bangladesh

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Bangladesh and its neighbouring country Pakistan continue to rank very low while a number of emerging economies enter the top 30.

Switzerland remains the world's most competitive economy, according to the Geneva-based forum.

The yearly report is based on publicly available data and a survey of 14,000 business leaders in 142 countries.

In terms of quality of overall infrastructure and GDP (gross domestic product) per capita, Bangladesh is ranked 129th out of 142 countries.

The global competitiveness ranking is done on the basis of 12 indicators: institutions, infrastructure, macroeconomic environment, health and primary education, higher education and training, goods market efficiency, labour market efficiency, financial market development, technological readiness, market size, business sophistication and innovation.

India is ranked 56th this time, down from last year's 51st, and Sri Lanka 52nd, up from last year's 62nd. Pakistan is ranked 118th, up from 123rd last year.

Indian govt introduces key land bill in parliament

AFP, New Delhi

India's government introduced a new land acquisition bill in parliament yesterday to address the concerns of farmers whose fields are purchased for the nation's rapid industrial development.

The bill, intended to replace a more than century-old law framed by India's former British colonial rulers, seeks to give farmers fairer prices for their land -- a politically-charged issue that has delayed many large-scale projects.

The long-awaited legislation is to be referred to a parliamentary committee for consideration and the final version expected to be submitted to lawmakers during the next session of parliament for approval.

Rural Development Minister Jairam Ramesh said the Congress party-led government hoped the legislation would be approved in December.

"The law will ensure the need for faster growth, faster urbanisation and faster industrialisation is balanced with the need to protect the interest of land-owners," he said ahead of the bill's introduction.

"Balance is the key," he added.

The bill was proposed in the final days of the current session of parliament, whose work has been paralysed by nationwide anti-corruption protests targeting the scandal-racked Congress government.

Acquiring land for factories, roads, housing and other projects has created battlegrounds across India. Many farmers say they have been forced to sell at below market rates and robbed of their livelihoods.