

Indian FM may visit

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Narendra Modi inviting his Bangladesh counterpart Sheikh Hasina to visit India between October and January next year, the sources said.

Hasina had visited New Delhi in January 2010 while immediate past Indian PM Manmohan Singh had been in Dhaka in September 2011.

As Modi has not chosen Bangladesh for his first official visit abroad, he is sending Sushma to convey a special message that the BJP government would work closely with the Awami League government, according to the sources.

An Indian diplomat in Dhaka said Indian foreign policy was good for regional cooperation. The policy was drafted by the central government in the interest of India, no matter which party was in power. The upcoming visit of Sushma would be very important and constructive, added the official.

There was no confirmation about the schedule of the minister's visit as officials in Dhaka and New Delhi said they have just opened initial discussion to that end.

The diplomatic circle in Dhaka said the visit would give a big push towards Dhaka-New Delhi fresh engagement.

Modi and Hasina are likely to meet at least twice at two major events this year -- the United Nations General Assembly in September and the Saarc Summit in Kathmandu in November.

Official sources said during her visit to Dhaka, Sushma would call on President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and hold official talks with her Bangladesh counterpart AH Mahmood Ali.

Dhaka would insist on taking forward the long pending Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) and Teesta river water sharing deal.

Asked about the date of the Indian minister's visit, a senior official at the foreign ministry yesterday told The Daily Star that they had been talking about June 26 but were waiting for confirmation.

"It is really at the very initial stage ... nothing is concrete and it is absolutely at the planning stage," a diplomat at the High Commission of India told The Daily Star yesterday.

Our New Delhi correspondent reported that two sets of dates were being considered, June 25-27 and June 26-28.

This could be Sushma's first foreign visit alone since taking over the external affairs ministry on May 27, a day after she was sworn in following Bharatiya Janata Party's landslide victory in parliamentary elections.

18 Indian cops convicted

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Kumar and head operator at city control room Jaspal Singh Gosain.

They were arrested for gunning down Ranbir Singh, an MBA student from Ghaziabad, July 3, 2009, on charges that he was attempting to commit crime.

The case was transferred to Delhi by India's top court on the plea of Ranbir's father Ravindra Singh.

A journalist, a friend

FROM PAGE 1
against. When he took charge of the newspaper in the 1990s, the feeling was strong among the reading public that under his leadership the organisation would grow and prosper. That hope was belied, for reasons not hard to fathom. Yet Alam struggled bravely on, until a few months ago. After decades spent in activist mode, he was finally into retirement.

There was in Alam a very human desire to be in the centre of things, which explains the many roles he played through a lifetime spent in the intensity of excitement. As a young man working for the Karachi-based Dawn newspaper in New Delhi, he covered the funeral of Jawaharlal Nehru in 1964. He used to regale a younger generation of journalists, in the 1980s, with tales of the oratory of such personalities as Indian politician Syed Badrudduja he had experienced at the funeral.

By the 1980s, of course, Alam was an older, different man. He was making his way back to journalism after a stint as Bangladesh's ambassador to Bhutan. He was taking over as editor of The New Nation from the venerable Motaahar Hossain Siddiqui. There was little question that he intended to make some positive changes in the newspaper. Impressed by the story of Lee Iaccocca's rise in life, he made it a point to ask the young newsmen

around him to read the man's biography.

A certain restlessness constantly defined Mahbul Alam. He basked in the glory that had marked his youth. In middle age, it became obvious at some point that he needed a change, through moving from journalism into government. The 1980s were the times when he served, besides Bhutan, as minister press at the Bangladesh embassy in Washington; as director general, external publicity at the Foreign Office here in Dhaka; and as managing director of Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS). He was comfortable in government, which truth was to become pronounced one last time when he found a place as adviser in the ill-fated and ill-conceived caretaker government led by President Iajuddin Ahmed between October 2006 and January 2007.

It was Mahbul Alam's misfortune to have been associated with the Plain Truth, a regular propaganda tract run by Radio Pakistan throughout the nine months of the Bangalees' struggle for liberation in 1971. It was a stigma that was to remain with him and was to put an end to his brief stint as press secretary to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in early 1972. For the more than four decades that he lived after that 1971-72 episode, Alam never spoke about it.

Mahbul Alam's journalistic career

may have been interrupted by his forays into other professional territories. But there is little question that there was about him an approachability that endeared him to others, to those who had cause to work under him. Chivalry was his hallmark and so was his informality. His patience with his colleagues hardly ever wore thin, unless he thought he was being taken advantage of. He had a good sense of humour that drew people to him.

Despite the many difficulties he was constantly up against as editor of the newspapers on his watch, Alam never failed to persuade younger journalists to be part of his team. In the early years of this century, informed that a journalist, having finished a stint as media spokesperson at a Bangladesh mission abroad, was coming back home, Alam called the individual long distance, told him his newspaper required his services and appointed him to a senior position in those brief moments of conversation.

That was Mahbul Alam's magnanimity. And it was there because he belonged to an era where men in positions of influence, warts and all, readily acknowledged the promise and the ability to shine in those who had followed his generation into the world of the newspaper.

Let Mahbul Alam rest in peace. And let us find peace in memories of him as a journalist, as a friend.

Pakistan's Geo News off air

Channel sues ISI for defamation

AGENCIES

Pakistan took the country's most popular television channel off air yesterday, the latest twist in a bitter row between Geo News and Islamabad's top spy agency over the shooting of a leading journalist.

The government's media regulatory body said in a statement the station's licence was being suspended for 15 days and it would have to pay a fine of 10 million rupees (\$100,000).

Meanwhile, Geo News yesterday said it is suing the powerful spy agency for defamation over accusations of being anti-state, it said yesterday.

"Geo and Jang Group (have) served legal notice on the Ministry of Defence, Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) for defaming and maligning the group," the channel said in a report published in a newspaper owned by its parent company.

"More than 8,000 journalists, workers and professionals attached to the group and their families are not only being harassed but also attacked and tortured across Pakistan."

Geo News has also given the ISI 14 days to retract its accusations and issue a public apology.

The standoff over Geo, part of the privately owned Jang Group, has exposed divisions between Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the army which has ruled the country for more than half of its history.

The military has long seen the government's resistance to efforts to shut Geo News as a sign of defiance and

PEMRA's latest move is seen as a compromise solution after weeks of tension.

Although Pakistani media have become increasingly vibrant in recent years, with stories exposing corruption or injustices appearing frequently on the pages of the country's many dailies, public criticism of the army or the ISI is largely taboo.

Observers will view the decision which the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) said was "unanimous", as a blow to freedom of expression as the all powerful army clamps down on critical coverage.

Geo News has locked horns with the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) ever since a prominent anchor of the television channel was attacked in the volatile port city of Karachi in April.

Hamid Mir was shot three times but survived, with his family blaming the chief of the ISI, General Zaheer-ul-Islam, for the attempted murder.

Mir's brother, Amir Mir, said Hamid had told him before the attack that he felt threatened and if anything happened to him the ISI chief "would be responsible".

Geo News broadcast images of Islam along with the Mir family allegations for eight hours, infuriating the military which filed a complaint to PEMRA seeking the channel's closure.

Mir has criticised the country's powerful intelligence agencies and military for their alleged role in the abduction of thousands of people in the restive southwestern province of

Sumitra new Speaker

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Congress, who had presided over the House between 2009 and this year.

Mahajan, 71, who has been representing Indore parliamentary constituency in central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh since 1989 without ever losing, is the longest-serving woman parliamentarian.

Mahajan's name for the post of Speaker was proposed by senior leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, of 13 parties cutting across the political spectrum.

Congratulating the new Speaker, Modi said, "It is inherent in your name [Sumitra] that you will have friendly and cordial relations with everyone."

"There are 315 new members in the House. This means we can leave some old traditions behind and start some new traditions. We can take the great traditions of the past forward; this new blood has the opportunity to present a strong [picture of] democracy in front of the world," he added.

Modi also thanked all lawmakers

for unanimously electing her as the Speaker.

Mahajan had served as a former federal Indian minister of state in the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee between 2002 and 2004 in a number of ministries, including Petroleum, Communications and Human Resources Development.

Popularly known as "tai" (elder sister in her mother tongue Marathi), Mahajan was born in 1943 in Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra. Mahajan was a housewife before she joined politics.

With a weak opposition in the House, presiding over the Lok Sabha should not be a problem for Mahajan, who is revered by all parties across the political spectrum for her amiable nature.

Nature opposition Congress has just 44 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha after suffering its worst defeat in recent national elections. The BJP and its allies, on the other hand, have 336 seats.

PM seeks

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established in Chittagong for China, and her government would provide necessary land for the purpose.

In this connection, she said Bangladesh could import a portion of gas which China was going to import from Myanmar through Kunming and it would be used at the proposed special economic zone.

The Chinese vice premier assured Hasina of discussing the matter with the authorities in Beijing, and said a positive decision could be taken to this end.

Commerce Minister Tofail Ahmed, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali, State Minister on Foreign Affairs Shahriar Alam, among others, were present on the occasion.

Later in the evening, Hasina attended the banquet hosted by the governor of the Yunnan province Li Jeheng.

Cheers for local manufacturers

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The association demanded waiver of duties on 49 items used in producing anti-cancer medicines, Karim said.

Beacon Pharmaceuticals is the market leader with 31 percent of the country's anti-cancer drug market, followed by Roche Bangladesh, the local arm of the Swiss healthcare company, at 24 percent.

Muhith also recommended increasing taxes on the imports of billets, the raw material for steel bar manufacturing, to Tk 5,000 from Tk 3,500 a tonne.

The government's move to increase import duty on billets will help protect the local steel industry, said Md Shahjahan, secretary general of Bangladesh

Steel Mill Owners. It brought some cheers to some manufacturers that are also developing billet producing units, he said.

But the government also hiked duty on imports of melting scrap, a billet raw material, by Tk 500 for each tonne to Tk 2,000.

"We urge the government to reduce duty on imports of melting scrap," Shahjahan said. The price of electricity should be the same for big and small manufacturers, he added.

Aameir Alihussain, managing director of BSRM, a listed steel maker, is far from optimistic, as he said the country is yet to become self-sufficient in producing billets, which means most manufacturers will have to depend

on imports.

Local steel producers can meet only half of the industry's demand that runs into 3.5 million tonnes a year, Alihussain said. "It will increase prices of rods and create market instability."

TEXTILE
Muhith's proposal to reduce supplementary duty on imports of woven fabrics from 30 percent to 20 percent will hurt local fabrics manufacturers such as Square Textiles and Envoy Textiles, said Salam Murshedy, president of Exporters Association of Bangladesh.

But it will help garment companies that depend on imported fabrics, BRAC-EPL, a leading stockbrokerage, said in a budget analysis.

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France suffer

FROM PAGE 1
"We have made checks in the beginning of the afternoon, checks that confirmed the situation has aggravated and he is today not capable of training for a few weeks, let alone play a game."

Ribery and Grenier will be replaced in the squad by Morgan Schneiderlin and Remy Cabella.

The replacements have to be validated by world governing body FIFA as they are made after the 23-man squad submission deadline, which was on June 2.

"We will hand over those two files and they will take the time they need to reply," said Deschamps.

"They are the first, Franck or Clement, to be very sad. Franck had problems but everything was going in the right direction until his situation suddenly aggravated."

France start their World Cup campaign on June 15 against Honduras in Group E, where they will also meet Ecuador and Switzerland.

Ribery was instrumental in France's qualifying campaign, scoring five goals and creating several chances for his team mates.

He has been suffering from lower back pains for weeks, playing his last game in the German Cup final on May 17 when he came as a substitute for Bayern Munich but could not finish the match.

Without him, Les Bleus beat Norway 4-0 and drew 1-1 against Paraguay in their two World Cup

warm-up games.

Ribery's spot on the left wing was taken by Real Sociedad's Antoine Griezmann and Newcastle United forward Loic Remy alternatively.

Both put in solid displays with Griezmann scoring the goal against Paraguay.

Deschamps probably wanted to avoid the mistakes his predecessors made when they took major players to tournaments with injuries hoping they would return to fitness during the competition.

In 2002, France coach Roger Lemerre took Zinedine Zidane to the World Cup after the playmaker had injured his thigh in their last warm-up game against South Korea. Zidane could only play in the final group game against Denmark and made no impact as Les Bleus crashed out in the first round.

At the 2008 European Championship, coach Raymond Domenech included the injured Patrick Vieira in his squad but he never played as France were also eliminated in the group stage.

With Ribery out, Deschamps could have called up Manchester City's Samir Nasri but having made clear he had not picked him in the first place because of his behaviour off the pitch, he overlooked him again.

France take on Jamaica in Lille on Sunday in their last warm-up game before the World Cup.

Nur Hossain's



FROM PAGE 16
claimed that he was on the run because he was scared.

"I last talked to Nur Hossain on April 27. After that I was not in touch with him. I have been in hiding in Harirampur and Jhitka of Manikganj, Fulbaria, Keraniganj, Narsingdi, Nabinagar, Kaliganj of Gazipur and Dohar before coming to Faridpur on Wednesday," he said.

He said he had been Hossain's bodyguard for three years.

Meanwhile, law enforcers have prepared a list of people involved with the 7-murder incident based on information gleaned from interrogating sacked army official Major Arif Hossain and navy officer Lt Commander MM Rana.

Sources who had seen their

statements given to police said that the name of a certain top official of the Rapid Action Battalion has come up as having given the order to kill. His name is being withheld because The Daily Star could not obtain the copy of the statements to cross check.

What is the police doing about the Rab top boss then?

"We are conducting an investigation to reach an end, not to target a certain person. However, if any name crops up during the investigation, we will surely examine it," said Superintendent Khandakar Mahiduddin of Narayanganj police.

In another development, Shakhawat Hossain, legal counsel for the law enforcers and president of the Narayanganj Lawyers' Association, claims to have been given a "death threat" on Thursday evening.

"I was about to return home from the court ... Suddenly, some people approached me and said, 'You are going too far by involving the Rab (in the incident). If you continue doing this, we will make you disappear. Do not cross your line,'" Shakhawat told The Daily Star.

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