

# Crucial Bimstec meeting Monday

## Officials to finalise 4 key deals thru' discussions

REZAUL KARIM

Senior officials from Bimstec countries will meet in Thailand on Monday to finalise four key instruments tied to the BIMSTEC Free Trade Area.

Dhaka believes early realisation of the Bimstec FTA is crucial for promoting trade and investment in the area.

The Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (Bimstec) is a regional organisation comprising Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Bhutan and Nepal.

Diplomatic sources said the three-day meeting of the Bimstec Trade Negotiation Committee (TNC) at Khon Kaen, Thailand will finalise the four agreements which are expected to be signed during the 6th Bimstec Trade and Economic Ministers Meeting in Dhaka in February or March next year.

The four instruments are: Agreement on Trade in Goods of the Framework Agreement on Bimstec Free Trade Area; Protocol to Amend the Framework Agreement on Bimstec Free Trade Area; Agreement on Dispute Settlement Procedures and Mechanism of the Framework Agreement on Bimstec Free Trade Area; and Agreement on Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters for Bimstec Free Trade area.

Munir Chowdhury, joint secretary (FTA-1) of the commerce ministry, will lead a seven-member Bangladesh delegation to the 20th TNC meeting. The team is composed of senior officials of law, finance and foreign affairs ministries, National

Board of Revenue and Bangladesh Tariff Commission.

The ministers of economics and trade of the Bimstec countries on February 8, 2004 had signed a framework agreement in Phuket, Thailand to establish a free trade area by 2012 and promote economic cooperation.

Talking to The Daily Star on Thursday, a senior foreign ministry official said Dhaka wants to see talks on investment and services have been fast-tracked as the Bimstec members are seeing impressive trends in economic growth.

To sustain the growth, the member countries need to secure a stable and affordable energy supply through exploration and utilisation of the regional energy resources which are core priorities for the Bimstec, he added.

Bangladesh is likely to host a taskforce meeting on energy in February next year. A memorandum of understanding on Bimstec energy and grid interconnection is likely to be finalised during the meeting to help foster cooperation in the energy sector.

The ministry official said the MoU on the grid interconnection has already been finalized. The deal is likely to be signed by the Bimstec energy ministers during a meeting in Nepal.

Regional connectivity is another area of cooperation which is likely to flourish from increased cooperation. This would facilitate trade, investment, tourism and people-to-people contact among the member states, he mentioned.



A follower mourning Pir Rahamat who, along with his attendant, was killed by an unknown assailant at his shrine in Chittagong yesterday. The Pir was popularly known as Lyangta Fakir.

PHOTO: STAR

# Pir, aide killed in Ctg shrine

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Monir was given first aid while Munna, 10, was admitted to Chittagong Medical College Hospital.

Locals Babul and Faruk also chased the man until they lost him near a hill.

They said the shrine was built on top of a hill in Bangla Bazar area around 20 years ago. Rahamat's devotees went there every Thursday.

On May 17, one Kamal Hossain was killed inside the shrine, said Kamal's

sister Josna Begum.

She alleged that some local criminals, including Jalil and Rashid, had killed Kamal, who was a regular at the shrine, for protesting extortion from shops around the shrine.

Contacted, Inspector Nurul Absar of Bayezid Police Station said Jalil was arrested in connection with the murder of Kamal and he gave a confessional statement before a court.

Police said the motive behind the

murder of Rahamat and Kader was unclear but they suspect that it was carried out either by a quarter with anti-shrine sentiments or for something personal.

Asked whether Rahamat and Kader's murder in broad daylight in a densely populated area signifies deterioration of law and order in the port city, Debdas Bhattacharjee, additional commissioner (crime and operation) of Chittagong Metropolitan Police,

said he did not think so.

"The murder was carried out when people had gone to the mosques for offering juma prayers. The women were in their homes. Despite this, some locals chased the assailant," said Debdas, adding that they have information that only one person killed the two.

Police said they detained a local for questioning as he was in the vicinity during the murder.

# Youth held for beating up schoolgirl

## Footage of assault go viral on social media

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Footage of a schoolgirl being beaten up by a schoolboy in Sadar upazila of Habiganj has triggered a huge public outcry.

Police yesterday arrested the assaulter, Ruhul Amin, after the footage went viral on the social networking site Facebook.

The arrestee, a class-IX student of Habiganj High School, was picked up from Richi village of Sadar upazila around 1:00pm, said Nazim Uddin, officer-in-charge of Habiganj Police Station.

Ruhul, a resident of Urigram in Baniachang upazila, stays at his maternal grandfather's house in the Sadar upazila.

The incident took place on August 26, 2015, and drew public attention after a 31-second video clip of the incident was uploaded on Facebook on September 1.

The video shows Ruhul blocking the class-VIII girl of Habiganj Girls High

School on Rajnagar Etimkhana Road and repeatedly slapping her.

Ruhul's friend Polash, a staff of a shoe shop, shot the video of the incident and spread it among his friends.

Embarrassed, the victim stopped going to school for two days after the incident spread out in the locality.

Ruhul's mother Esha Khatun said the victim's brother had beaten up her son earlier for stalking the girl. "So he [Ruhul] took revenge."

After the video was released, people called upon the law enforcers to trace the assaulter and bring him to book.

Meanwhile, locals yesterday formed a human chain in front of Saifur Rahman Town Hall in the town, protesting the incident.

Shamima Akhtar Chowdhury, head teacher of the girls' school, said the victim's guardian did not complain about the matter. "Several stalkers were detained by the law enforcers after we reported such incident to the police."

She demanded exemplary punishment of the assaulter.

# Suicide or murder?

FROM PAGE 1

According to Sylhet Gonojagoron Mancha Convener Debabrata Debu, Shahriar had been receiving death threats since 2013. The last threat came early this year for protesting the murder of secularist writer Avijit Roy in February, he added.

Shahriar had all along with Debu in organising local programmes of Gonojagoron Mancha. "He was not a person who would give up so easily," said Debu.

Like Debu, those who were close to Shahriar didn't take it as a suicide after he was found hanging with a waist belt from his room's window grill.

Around 8:00pm on Thursday, police recovered the body breaking into the room on the top floor of the three-storey building on Road 4 in Surma residential area, only half-an-hour walk from his university. Roommates had called police as he was not responding to their repeated knocking.

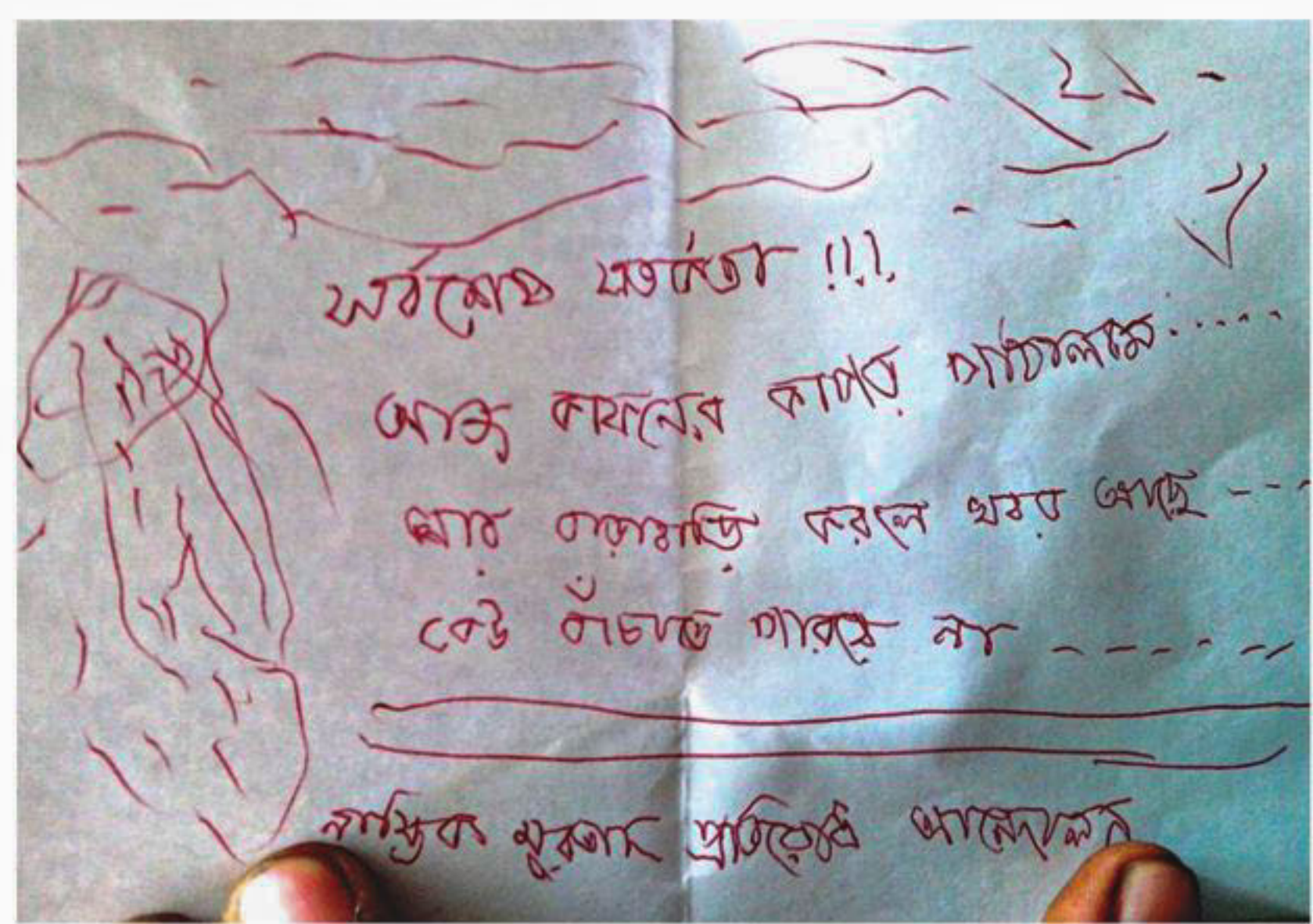
His elder brother filed a first information report with Sylhet Kotwali Police Station, which recorded it as a case of unnatural death.

Suhel Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Sylhet Kotwali Police Station, said they right away informed the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) as there were reasons to doubt if it was a suicide at all.

A CID team visited the spot around 11:00pm on Thursday.

"From his Facebook posts, the idea we get about his current mental state makes us believe that he was not considering suicide. We believe it's a murder," said Paplu Bangli, president of Sylhet district Chhatra Union.

Shahriar's laptop was open and his WhatsApp account was still logged in when he was found dead, said the left



The note sent to Shahriar with a piece of shroud in February 2013. "This is our final warning!!! Today we are sending only a shroud ... Nobody can save you [next time]," said the note.

PHOTO: SHAHRIAR'S FACEBOOK PAGE

activist. Besides, if it was really a suicide, Shahriar would have prepared for it by collecting ropes.

According to noted writer Prof Zafar Iqbal, Shahriar was an energetic youth who could undertake a project like over-1.75km road painting at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology (SUST).

In March 2013, demanding death penalty for war criminals and expressing solidarity with the Shahbagh Movement, several hundred students made the painting which depicted the historic events from 1952 to 1971.

"Only the post-mortem report can say if it was a murder or suicide," said the SUST teacher. "But those who had been threatening him over the years might be behind his death."

Muhammad Shahriar Majumder, a

final-year architecture student, was advisers of SUST Sahitya Sangsad and Cartoon Factory, and convener of SUST Sangskritik Jote, according to his Facebook profile.

His death comes at a time when law enforcers are struggling to unearth the mystery behind the brutal murders of four secularist bloggers.

Niladri Chattopadhyay Niloy, 28, who too was a Gonojagoron Mancha activist, is the fourth blogger to have been hacked to death this year by suspected Islamist militants.

At 7:27pm on Wednesday, Shahriar in his last Facebook post wrote: "At last...", sharing the news of a suspect named Mannan Rahi confessing to the murder of Ananta Bijoy Das, one of the slain bloggers.

[Our Moulvibazar correspondent contributed to this report]

# Expats in Libya

FROM PAGE 1

still work there. And they are not happy.

"It is very difficult to go out on the streets. Nobody knows when they will be attacked or robbed," said Jahangir Alam who has been working in Tripoli for six years.

Just a month ago, he and six of his colleagues were returning to their homes from work when an armed group robbed them of several thousand Libyan dinars and six mobile phones, Jahangir said.

"And last year, all that we had saved for our families back home were stolen from our residence," he told The Daily Star over the phone. "There are no authorities here to go with complaints."

That's not all they have to deal with.

"There's no money transfer service here. So, we have to send money to our families through handi which costs us a lot. For one [Libyan] dinar we send, our families get Tk 35-40," Jahangir said. The current market value of 1 Libyan Dinar is equivalent to Tk 56, down from Tk 63-65 last year.

He said he was now planning to return home, most possibly after Eid-ul-Azha.

Counsellor (Labour) ASM Ashrafur Islam of Bangladesh mission for Libya said they were aware of the situation and had advised the Bangladeshis there to move around in groups, and not after the sunset.

But there's a huge demand for

Bangladeshi workers in Libya now, he said, as foreign companies have closed their operations there and most migrants from Egypt, Chad and Ghana have returned home since 2011. "The minimum wage is equivalent to Tk 30,000 which is quite good."

But since there were no proper money transfer channels, many are returning to Bangladesh, Ashrafur added.

According to him, 50 to 60 Bangladeshis are returning home every month, up from 30 to 40 in the last two years.

On Bangladeshis taking sea journeys to Europe, the counsellor said they were aware of it.

Asked if the government was planning to repatriate the Bangladeshis from Libya, Ashrafur Islam replied in the negative. "But we are providing legal and consular assistance to those wishing to return home."

A former diplomat, who has worked in Libya, said the Bangladeshi migrants feel more vulnerable because of the relocation of Bangladesh embassy to Tunisia. "A second thought should have been given before the relocation," he said, wishing anonymity.

However, Ashrafur Islam said though the embassy has been moved, some low-level embassy staffs are still working in Libya and senior officials take turns in providing consular services there.

# 16 kg gold found in airport toilet

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sixteen kg gold was found in a toilet at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport last night.

Nurul Islam, managing director of a company named Anik-Ayon International, was detained in this connection, said Moinul Khan, DG, Customs Intelligence.

Nurul is under suspicion because of his dubious presence in and around the airport toilet, he said, adding the gold was worth around Tk 8 crore.

Customs sources said the intelligent officials found the gold bars and ornaments wrapped in a basket with tissue papers in a toilet of the immigration zone around 10:30pm.

The officials, however, could not say anything about the flight that carried the gold in.

# RAJON MURDER Kamrul to be brought back in 2 weeks

STAR REPORT

The government has completed all necessary procedures for bringing back Kamrul Islam, the prime accused in Rajon murder case, from Saudi Arabia within two weeks, the state minister for foreign affairs said yesterday.

Shahriar Alam made the comment while addressing the inaugural ceremony of a four-day conference on the Model United Nations (UN) at Rajshahi University, reports our RU correspondent.

He said they had already handed over necessary legal documents to the Interpol for repatriating Kamrul.

"He [Kamrul] will be brought back to the country after the Interpol finalises the papers," Shahriar added.

On Thursday, the state minister in a

Facebook post said: "Saudi Royal court approved deportation of Kamrul. They have already issued letter to Interpol. Few other paperwork should not take more than two weeks."

Thirteen-year-old Samiul Islam Rajon died of brain haemorrhage after a group of brutes beat him up in Sylhet on July 8 apparently to punish him for stealing. Kamrul fled to Saudi Arabia soon after the incident.

Shahriar spoke as the chief guest at yesterday's conference on Model UN. This year, its theme is "Reinstating Good Governance for Equitable and Sustainable Economic Growth".

The United Nations Youth and Student Association of Bangladesh organised the conference which is being joined by some 266 participants from seven countries.

# Police to crack down on Tahir men

## Monitor the banned outfit's web conference

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police said they would soon launch a crackdown on those who conducted and participated in a web conference claimed to be organised by banned militant outfit Hijb ut-Tahrir yesterday.

The web conference started at 3:30pm and continued for around two hours and a half. The organisation, banned in October 2009, had been circulating the news of this conference for the last couple of weeks through posters, leaflets and social media posts, according to intelligence sources.

Police could easily foil the conference, but they let it happen for strategic reasons, said Deputy Commissioner (Media) Muntasirul Islam of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP).

"We did not want to stop the conference as part of our strategy. We wanted to know who were participating in the conference and who had radical mindset," he told The Daily Star.

He said law enforcement agencies have monitored the conference, gathered information on the participants and are now verifying those. "We will soon launch a crackdown to arrest them," he added.

"We have monitored the conference and identified the speakers and some participants. We are now working to bring them to book," said Lt Col Abul Kalam Azad, director of the intelligence wing of the Rapid Action Battalion.

# Tsipras hints at possible vote deal

AFP, Athens

Greece's former leader Alexis Tsipras has opened the door to a coalition with rivals on the left should his Syriza party fail to win a majority in elections in two weeks' time.

Tsipras, who quit as prime minister last month triggering a snap vote on September 20, had previously ruled out any cooperation with the Pasok socialists or the conservatives of New Democracy, who have alternated in power for much of the last four decades.

But in an interview late Thursday with the TV channel Kontra, he hinted Syriza could work with Pasok if its new leader Fofi Gennimata "distances herself from the right". Pasok and New Democracy have previously governed together in coalition.

"Fofi Gennimata has adopted the position of the right and not that of European social democracy. If that does not change -- and I'd be happy if it did change -- there cannot be any prospect of cooperation," Tsipras said.