

# Foreign minister meets Indian external affairs minister

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Foreign ministers of Bangladesh and India yesterday discussed various issues relating to the bilateral relations between the two countries. They agreed to have the next meeting of the Joint Consultative Commission, co-chaired by the two ministers, in Dhaka in July this year. The discussion took place when Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali yesterday had a meeting with the Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj at her office in New Delhi, said a foreign ministry press release. Ali is currently in New Delhi to attend the first meeting of the Raisina Dialogue.

# PM pins hope

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Implement development projects promptly, strengthen monitoring and expedite the pace of development in the country, said the PM. The government with support from Korean Exim Bank implemented the project involving Tk 403 crore. Another 160 UITRCEs will be set up under the project in phases. Hasina said the country's education system would fully be based on ICT. The government will set up a UITRCE in every upazila to provide training to all teachers on ICT so that they can teach their students in the classroom, she added. She termed the inauguration of the UITRCEs a milestone in the history of the country's education system. She mentioned that her government also set up 5,275 union digital centres. Besides, 8,000 post offices will be turned into digital centres in phases. The PM said the main aim of her government is to ensure balanced development of the country and eradicate poverty through education. "The aim of our government is to reduce the income inequality between the rich and the poor.... We want to develop the country where people would get a better life. Without education, we can't eliminate poverty from the country."

The UITRCEs, the premier said, will be turned into full-fledged ICT training labs which would speed up the ICT training for the teachers and students at primary and post-primary level institutions at the grassroots. The UITRCEs will be utilised for ICT education of teachers, access to information for students, teachers, citizens, and the local Education Management Information System (EMIS) data centres. Education Minister Nurul Islam Nahid and South Korean Ambassador to Bangladesh Ahn Seong-doo were present as special guests at the function.

# 10 hurt

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Hospital with head injuries. BU students also attacked on Selim Ahmed, cameraman of Bangla Vision, and damaged his camera during the clash. Witnesses said Sajib Hossain, an employee of fast food shop, Hot-Plate, was sacked by its owner allegedly for stealing a mobile phone set on Monday. Over the issue, Sajib and his one colleague locked in a scuffle yesterday noon. Later at 4:00pm, friends of Sajib, including some BU students, tried to attack the shop. On information, police rushed in and tried to quell the situation. At one stage, the students threw brick chips at the law enforcers that led to the clash, said police. Contacted, Shafiu Alam, proctor of the university, said the matter was not related to the university rather he said the BU authorities were trying to contact with police and the administration to release the detained students.

# BFF suspends

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subcommittee which questioned the alleged players on the basis of disciplinary allegations. The allegations were brought by a separate fact-finding committee formed to investigate the failure of the team in last year's SAFF Suzuki Cup and this year's Bangabandhu Gold Cup. "Of these copied cards, may be, some were used by the Bangladeshi expatriates in Saudi Arabia or Saudi nationals visiting Bangladesh at that time," said Kazi Saifuddin Munir, managing director of IT Consultants Limited that runs the country's largest payments switch, Q Cash. The ATM frauds that took place between February 6 and February 12 created a huge hue and cry in the country as such incidents were first of its kind in Bangladesh.

# Rapist gets

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siblings of the charges, said prosecution lawyer Farid Ahmed Hasezi. In August 2006, Sohel on many occasions raped his cousin, a class-VIII student back then. At one stage, she became pregnant and gave birth to a baby boy in August 2007. As the accused refused to marry her, the victim filed the case that year.

# One step forward

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The depositions of witnesses and their cross examinations are hand written by the judges concerned in courts and then they are typed. This is time-consuming. But in the 20 courts, statements and cross examinations will be composed on computers by stenographers from now on; in front of the judges, prosecution and defence lawyers, plaintiffs, and witnesses, Sabbir Foyez, additional registrar of the High Court Division of the Supreme Court, told The Daily Star. The judges, lawyers, plaintiffs, and witnesses will be able to watch on the monitors if the records were being made correctly, he said, adding that if a recording was incorrect, it could be fixed instantly. Sabbir said the records would be preserved in tamper-proof computers and copies of the records would be printed after they are recorded correctly. The copies would be provided to the judges and lawyers after they were signed by officials concerned, he said, adding that the same system would be introduced in phases at all courts of the country. He said the system would speed up trials and therefore reduce the backlog of cases at courts, the suffering of justice seekers, and save their money. Similar systems would be set up in courts of nine districts, including Dhaka, Rajshahi, Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal, Rangpur, and Sylhet within this year, Sabbir said. He said the testing of the system started in the Sylhet courts seven to eight months ago. At the appellate and high court divisions of the SC, a digitised system was already in place for listing the serial numbers of cases and bail confirmations. Replying to a query, Sabbir said the United Nations Development Programme financed the digitised

deposition recording system in Sylhet. Finance Minister AMA Muhith, who was at the inauguration programme, assured that his ministry would allocate Tk 10 crore for setting up the system in other courts of the country. He said 10 to 15 years' time would be needed to have an e-judiciary. Chief Justice Sinha at the function urged all to stay alert while making comment on the judiciary. He said some judgments have been pending with few judges who have retired six to seven years ago. The chief justice said the people in television talk-shows do not say anything against this practice. They rather speak in such a manner that appears to malign the chief justice. He said, "Today, our country's media has achieved a lot. Today we see a lot in the media. Discussions take place in talk shows at night. Discussions on the judiciary are held in the electronic and print media. I want to tell everyone in this programme, we have the media liberty. Freedom of press is guaranteed under article-39 of the constitution. But this freedom is subject to some restrictions. Excess liberty does not bring people's well-being. It should have a limit." Justice Sinha said the problem with huge backlog of 30 lakh pending cases could be resolved, if the older laws were updated. Amid the lawyers' demand, Law Minister Anisul Huq assured them of taking steps to install lifts in court buildings, constructing bridges to connect the bar and court buildings, and allocate Tk 5 lakh for its library. Justice Md Imman Ali of the Appellate Division, State Minister for ICT Division Zunaid Ahmed Palak, UN Resident Coordinator Robert Watkins, also spoke at the meeting presided over by Sylhet District Judge Munir Hosain Patuarty. Our correspondent in Sylhet contributed to this report.

delay of two to two and a half months. Many of the genuine applicants were not given visa without assigning any reason, he said. Travel agency sources alleged that the problem took a serious turn after two new officials joined the visa section in recent months. Since then, the embassy is issuing visas against 10 to 15 percent of the applications, keeping the rest pending. An official at the foreign ministry quoted embassy officials as saying that the Thai immigration department has introduced a new system that requires approval from Bangkok for issuing visas. As a result, the local officials are unable to issue visa quickly like in the past. Thai embassy officials could be contacted after repeated attempts but The Daily Star failed to get any comment from them. The Bangladesh foreign ministry twice called the Thai embassy officials, asking it to explain the reasons behind the delay in visa processing. The ministry also asked for easing up visa procedures. Officials said the foreign ministry received an unspecified number of complaints from different quarters that the Thai embassy authorities are neither speedily issuing visas nor returning the passports of the visa applicants. Bangladesh Ambassador to Thailand Saida Muna Tasneem recently met Commander of Immigration Bureau of Thailand Police Major General Supapone Arunsit and Suvat Chirapant, Deputy Permanent Secretary in charge of visa applicants to discuss the large number of pending visa cases as well as the visa procedures. Talking to The Daily Star over phone on Tuesday, Ambassador Tasneem said that she met top Thai government officials and drew their attention to the fact that 110,000 Bangladesh tourists visited Thailand in 2015. Amid the concern of Dhaka, the Thai authorities recently assured the government of "necessary efforts" to make the visa process "smoother within the existing national and regional security context". But the sufferings of Thai visa seekers have not eased even after the assurance from the Thai authorities in Dhaka and Bangkok.

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# Hassles over Thai visa

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officials, tourists and private-sector officials who have to attend various conferences and meetings. Usually, the embassy used to issue visas within three to four working days in the past. From January to late February, no fewer than 20,000 Thai visa applications of Bangladeshis were left pending, sources said. Even the credible visa seekers like Bangladesh government officials, members of the armed forces, businessmen, investors and tourists and others who make foreign trips each year for multiple purposes were not given visa on time. Talking to The Daily Star yesterday, a footwear businessman in Dhaka said he abandoned his visit to Thailand and then travelled to China after the embassy refused him visa keeping his passport for over a month. "Although I went to Thailand over two dozen times, this time they did not issue visa and harassed me by asking for various trade-related documents, certificates etc," he said. Failing to get visa after a long wait, he started business with China. He got Chinese visa easily and already made a successful trip there. Besides, a leading travel agency official said that after nearly two months of delay, they received visas for over 1,000 applications last week. But the applicants had to face serious difficulties as many failed to keep their appointments with doctors in Thailand. Several applicants also missed their scheduled trips abroad because the Thai embassy kept their passports. "We made repeated requests for return of some passports and also wanted to withdraw the visa applications of those who needed passports urgently," said the official. "But the embassy ignored all this." Another top executive of a travel agency yesterday told The Daily Star that they were giving visa assistance to a large number of applicants, including a good number of government officials. Many of their regular clients could not attend important conferences, business meetings and had to miss appointments with doctors and hospitals as the embassy issued visas after a

delay of two to two and a half months. Many of the genuine applicants were not given visa without assigning any reason, he said. Travel agency sources alleged that the problem took a serious turn after two new officials joined the visa section in recent months. Since then, the embassy is issuing visas against 10 to 15 percent of the applications, keeping the rest pending. An official at the foreign ministry quoted embassy officials as saying that the Thai immigration department has introduced a new system that requires approval from Bangkok for issuing visas. As a result, the local officials are unable to issue visa quickly like in the past. Thai embassy officials could be contacted after repeated attempts but The Daily Star failed to get any comment from them. The Bangladesh foreign ministry twice called the Thai embassy officials, asking it to explain the reasons behind the delay in visa processing. The ministry also asked for easing up visa procedures. Officials said the foreign ministry received an unspecified number of complaints from different quarters that the Thai embassy authorities are neither speedily issuing visas nor returning the passports of the visa applicants. Bangladesh Ambassador to Thailand Saida Muna Tasneem recently met Commander of Immigration Bureau of Thailand Police Major General Supapone Arunsit and Suvat Chirapant, Deputy Permanent Secretary in charge of visa applicants to discuss the large number of pending visa cases as well as the visa procedures. Talking to The Daily Star over phone on Tuesday, Ambassador Tasneem said that she met top Thai government officials and drew their attention to the fact that 110,000 Bangladesh tourists visited Thailand in 2015. Amid the concern of Dhaka, the Thai authorities recently assured the government of "necessary efforts" to make the visa process "smoother within the existing national and regional security context". But the sufferings of Thai visa seekers have not eased even after the assurance from the Thai authorities in Dhaka and Bangkok.

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# Cancer patient

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Norma, from Michigan, told The Huffington Post: "People shouldn't be afraid to travel. No matter your age." She made the decision to go on the trip in August 2015 after she was diagnosed with uterine cancer and was asked by a doctor about how she would like to proceed with her treatment. Norma, whose husband had died two days earlier, said: "I'm 90 years old, I'm hitting the road." Her decision has been widely supported and a Facebook page documenting her travels, called Driving Miss Norma, has so far garnered almost 90,000 "likes". In a post on the page, her family wrote about the decision to not have treatment and to travel instead. According to them, Norma's doctor fully supported the idea and said: "As doctors we see what cancer treatment looks like every day. ICU, nursing homes, awful side effects and honestly, there is no guarantee she will survive the initial surgery to remove the mass. "You are doing exactly what I would want to do in this situation. Have a fantastic trip!" Speaking to The Huffington Post, Norma's daughter-in-law Ramie said they had no plans to stop travelling yet. She said: "We have no idea where or when it will end. We are living in the present moment." "Everyone has different ideas about how they want the end of their life to work. As a planet, we need to have this conversation," she told ABC News.

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