

Solma's wait to end next week

Likely to be repatriated after 19-month stay in Indian shelter home

SUBRATA ACHARJEE, Kolkata

After a long 19 months' time at an Indian shelter home, Bangladeshi citizen Solma Begum might be repatriated within the next week.

"We confirmed that Solma Begum is a Bangladeshi citizen. We are making arrangements for her repatriation shortly," said BM Jamal Hossain, counsellor of Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata, after he visited the shelter home in Hooghly yesterday.

The 39-year-old woman of Sundarganj in Gaibandha, who had psychological issues, went missing around four years back. The mother of three children, including two minors, was rescued by Hooghly police in

India on April 4 last year and sent to the shelter home, Janasiksha Prochar Kendra.

A medical examination the next day confirmed her mental disorder.

After counselling and treatment for six months, she partly recovered and remembered that she was from Bangladesh. The shelter home authorities then contacted her relatives in Gaibandha.

Relatives sent copies of the national identity cards of Solma and her husband and photographs of other family members to the Janasiksha shelter home.

As the matter was communicated to Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata on May 25, it sent the

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BM Jamal Hossain, counsellor (political) of Bangladesh mission in Kolkata, taking Solma Begum's fingerprint on an application for her repatriation at Janasiksha Prochar Kendra, a shelter home, in West Bengal's Hooghly yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Dhaka, Delhi preparing for PM's visit to India in Dec

REZAUL KARIM

Several high-level officials are expected to visit Dhaka and New Delhi in the coming weeks to prepare the groundwork for Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's proposed trip to India in December.

"We already have set a mechanism both in security and defense fields, but the upcoming visit will help enhance further cooperation to enable the forces of the two countries to fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the region," a diplomatic source told The Daily Star yesterday.

During Hasina's visit at the invitation of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Modi would also convey India's message to stand by her government on security or any other issues for the interest of India and Bangladesh, the source in New Delhi said.

New Delhi also wants Hasina's government to take effective measures to ensure full safety and security of religious minorities in Bangladesh.

Hasina might fly to India on December 3, and talks between Hasina and Modi would take place on that day.

Hasina's visit to India has been considered highly important in the context of Chinese President Xi Jinping's October 14-15 visit to Bangladesh when the two countries inked at least 27 deals involving about \$25 billion.

The source in New Delhi yesterday said Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar is expected to pay an official visit to Bangladesh this month.

"Defence minister's visit is on the cards, but there is no official confirmation of the date yet," said an Indian diplomat in Dhaka, adding, "It is due and both sides are trying to figure it out."

Chinese Defence Minister Chang Wanquan visited Bangladesh on May 28-30. Chang, who led a 39-member delegation, met President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and senior defence officials, including the chiefs of army, navy and the air force.

Prior to the visit of Manohar, Bangladesh and India will hold a fortnight-long joint military exercise starting from November 5 at Shaheed Salahuddin Cantonment in Ghatail of Tangail.

This is a part of the ongoing Bangladesh-India defence cooperation, according to an Indian defence ministry statement.

It added, "The exercise is an important bilateral defence cooperation endeavour between India and Bangladesh and will be the sixth edition of the exercise which is hosted alternately by both countries."

When asked, a government official in Dhaka said the exercise will practise counter-terrorism and disaster management operations.

China still remains Bangladesh's main supplier of military hardware, its largest trading partner and continues to make large investments in the country.

During the visit of the Chinese president, the two countries also

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4 'JMB men' arrested in Bagerhat

STAR REPORT

Police claimed to have arrested four members of banned Jama'atul Mujahideen Bangladesh (JMB) along with a firearm and crude bombs in Christian Palli area in Bagerhat town early yesterday.

They are Morshed Alam, 20, Saiful Islam, 36, and Maksudur Rahman alias Tota, 20, of Satkhira, and Jahirul Islam, 20, of Pirojpur.

Pankaj Chandra Roy, superintendent of police in Bagerhat, said police raided a tea stall at Christian Palli area around 12:30am on information that some JMB members were holding a secret meeting to carry out subversive activities in the town.

Police then arrested the four with a homemade gun, two crude bombs, two bullets, two sharp weapons, some bomb-making materials and a laptop. Three to four criminals managed to flee, reports our Bagerhat correspondent, quoting the police official.

Four cases were filed yesterday against the arrestees with Bagerhat Model Police Station.

Saiful stands accused in a case filed in connection with the August 17 countrywide series bomb attacks carried out by the JMB. He was recently freed on bail in the case, reports our Satkhira correspondent, quoting Firoz Hossain Mollah, officer-in-charge of Sadar Police Station.

Morshed's father Gias Uddin is in jail in a case filed in connection with the countrywide bomb blasts.

Idol Islam, brother of Tota, filed a general diary with Satkhira Sadar Police Station on October 17, saying that his brother went missing since October 16.

Father of Saiful also lodged a GD with the same police station on October 22, saying that his son went missing.

Negligence of local admin

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There was no negligence on our part," he told reporters at his secretariat office.

Responding to another query, he said, "We've seen we had no shortcomings. He [the OC of Nasiragar Police Station] also had no failing. Yet, we thought he could do more and play a proactive role, and that's why we've withdrawn him."

Fisheries Minister Sayeedul Haque, the local MP, echoed the home minister, saying some "chaotic incidents" took place between 12:00noon and 2:00pm, but police and the local administration contained it immediately and successfully.

A group of religious zealots carried out a synchronised attack on the Hindus, vandalising around 100 homes and temples and looting their valuables, including cash, gold ornaments and idols, television and mobile phones. The two-hour mayhem followed a Facebook post from the account of Rasraj Das, a local fisherman, "hurting the religious sentiment" of the Muslims.

Rasraj, 27, is now in jail in a case filed over the post. Before his arrest and the systematic attack, he claimed he had nothing to do with the post, but apologised for it anyway. Relatives say his account may have been hacked.

The three-member probe committee of the NHRC, which visited the area on Wednesday, said it did not appear to the committee members that Rasraj, an illiterate man from Jelepura area, could post the derogatory picture on his Facebook page.

Briefing reporters about the findings, NHRC Chairman Kazi Reazul Hoque said, "Nasiragar administration and police cannot duck their responsibilities."

Withdrawing the OC is not enough, he said, demanding tougher actions based on investigation into the police officer's role during the rampage.

The Upazila Nirbahi Officer should also be withdrawn immediately, as the vandals could carry out the attack because of his folly, he told The Daily Star after the briefing.

Different groups of youths carried out the attack simultaneously in multiple places, which indicates that it was planned, he added.

The probe report also named some people who were "involved with the conspirators".

The NHRC will submit the report to the ministry concerned as soon as possible.

CIVIL SOCIETY, MEDIA LAMBASTED Fisheries Minister Sayeedul Haque yesterday slammed rights activist Sultan Kamal and Hindu-Buddha-Christian Oikya Parishad leader Rana Dasgupta for not meeting him during their visit in the affected areas.

"They visited the area, talked to their aides and left without talking to me. How would they know the facts unless they talk to me?" he sought to know, while speaking at a rally at the Gouro Temple premise in Nasiragar.

For the first time since the attack, the minister visited a badly damaged temple yesterday.

Criticising the media for blowing the incident out of proportion, Sayeedul said, "The job of the media is to write news objectively. Instead, they raised a hue and cry while covering the event."

The media always publish negative reports instead of positive ones, he alleged.

In his rant against the media, the minister at one stage called on journalists to "write against me whatever you want".

Referring to an intelligence report, he told the rally that no people from Hefajat-e Islam or anyone wearing panjabi and tupi (prayer cap) took part in the attack or looting.

One man from the audience instantly protested, saying they saw people with panjabi and tupi attacking Gouro Temple.

The minister then angrily asked him to give the names.

As more people supported the man, the minister abruptly dropped the issue.

Responding to criticism that he was late to visit the areas, he said those who wished his death and wanted him to quit politics had spread such propaganda.

SUSPICIOUS MOVEMENT

Court discharges Daud Merchant

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday cleared Indian fugitive criminal Abdur Rauf Daud Merchant, a suspected associate of underworld don Daud Ibrahim, of charges for suspicious movement.

Metropolitan Magistrate AKM Mainuddin passed the order after scrutinising a probe report on the allegation submitted by investigators, court sources said.

Jahangir Kabir, senior jail super of Dhaka Central Jail in Keraniganj, told The Daily Star last night that they received the court order.

However, Daud Merchant would not be released as he still stands accused in another case filed with Adabar Police Station, added Jahangir.

In January this year, Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said an

initiative had been taken for Daud's repatriation. But, since then he had been in jail.

Police held Daud Merchant, a convicted killer of music baron Gulshan Kumar, in 2009 for intruding into Bangladesh.

Daud Merchant was arrested along with another Indian national Mohammad Zahid in Brahmanbaria where he had been hiding in guise of a Bangladeshi citizen for around a month.

In December 2014, he obtained bail in a case and was subsequently released from Kashimpur Central Jail in Gazipur. He, however, was re-arrested outside the jail.

He was then produced before a Dhaka court and it placed him on a three-day remand in a case filed under section 54 of the Code of Criminal Procedure for suspicious movement.

Kamdeb

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to six and a half centimetres. The tree bears four to 10mm long fragrant flowers -- sepal four, dissimilar and oval shape. Four petals and many stamens. The edible fruits hang from the trees. The oval stones are brown in colour. The timber looks reddish brown. The wood is used for making boats, masts, and various household stuff. It is also used for making approach roads of the ghats (landing stations) in our coastal areas. The seed oil is used as fuel in India. Saplings are grown from the seeds and cutting. The flowers and fruits grow from January to July. The origin of the tree is Thailand, India and southwest China. The closest species of *Kamdeb* is *Sultanchampa* which is fairly common

in our coastal belts.

According to Botany reference books, the tree is indigenous to Sylhet, Cox's Bazar and Chittagong hill tracts. It may be assumed that the trees are in an endangered state in the areas, as there is no updated record with the forest department itself.

Kamal Hossain, professor of the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Science at Chittagong University, says the tree may exist in a small number in our hill tracts.

Although the Mirpur Botanical Garden is home to a good number of rare trees and plants and quite rich in variety, the garden is poorly maintained. None of the trees bears any nameplate. The garden also lacks a proper road map.

The fate of the world is teetering

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"Imagine it is January 20, 2017 and imagine that it is Donald Trump standing in front of the Capitol," she told a 15,000-strong crowd in Tempe, Arizona, triggering a chorus of boos for her Republican opponent.

"Imagine that he is taking the oath of office and then imagine that he is in the Oval Office making the decisions that affect your lives and your future," she said.

Clinton painted a picture of Trump as a president who demeans women, exacerbates racial divisions and is so thin-skinned and unpredictable that he could "start a real war instead of a Twitter war."

The note of caution was echoed by Obama, who warned voters that America's very future was at stake.

"The fate of the republic rests on your shoulders," he declared in North Carolina, one of a handful of swing states where the race will be decided.

"The fate of the world is teetering and you, North Carolina, are going to have to make sure that we push it in the right direction," Obama declared.

The 70-year-old Republican, by contrast, treated supporters in Florida to a now familiar tirade, predicting Clinton's downfall and vowing to "drain the swamp" of corruption in Washington.

Appearing at a triumphal rally in Pensacola, Trump also highlighted his need to stay on message and avoid the self-inflicted gaffes that have marred his White House run.

"Nice and cool. Right? Stay on point Donald, stay on point. No sidetracks Donald, nice and easy," he said.

Trump boasted that many opinion-makers and voters are now flocking to his

standard.

"We're only left with one person, crooked Hillary Clinton. We're going to win. We're going to win."

Such talk -- partly supported by one poll on Tuesday showing him moving slightly ahead of Clinton -- has delighted America's foes, made its allies queasy and spooked financial markets.

Trump has been battered by scandals that would have sunk a less brazen showman: accused of sexual assault, of not paying taxes and of ties to Russia's Vladimir Putin and the mob.

But renewed FBI scrutiny of Clinton's use of a private email server when secretary of state has fired up the Republican's raucous fan base and fed doubts about the Democrat's trustworthiness.

'DOWNRIGHT EMBARRASSING' The dramatic tightening in the polls has convulsed financial markets worldwide in the past few days. The dollar slipped against the euro, while the Mexican peso -- sensitive to Trump's threat to build a wall on the country's border -- lost one percent.

This week, US Secretary of State John Kerry admitted the campaign has been "downright embarrassing" as he deals with America's friends and foes abroad, and the latter are in full voice.

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei -- whose regime paints America as a comic-book foe -- crowed that the "catastrophic reality" of the candidates "goes beyond what even we were saying."

In Britain, a giant effigy of Trump wielding the head of his rival Clinton was to be burned during traditional November 5 bonfire night celebrations.

LONG-SHOT BETS

The long and often unedifying 2016 race is now being fought in a few corners of a few states, most notably Florida, Ohio and North Carolina.

These three states offer the best chance for both candidates to cross the winning threshold of 270 out of 538 electoral college votes.

But the two hopefuls have also placed some long-shot bets.

Clinton travelled to Arizona, which Democrats haven't won since 1996 when her husband Bill claimed the presidency by a landslide.

An Emerson poll on Wednesday had Clinton losing the state by only four percentage points, and both of its Republican senators oppose Trump, offering the prospect of a shock Clinton win.

Meanwhile, Trump campaigned in Wisconsin and Michigan, both traditionally Democratic states where polls show Clinton leading by six points or more.

But he spent most of Wednesday in Florida -- which is likely to make-or-break his presidential dreams -- and will remain there yesterday to build momentum.

Both candidates are already planning for a favourable outcome on Election Night.

Trump's campaign said Wednesday its invitation-only "victory party" will be held at the Hilton Midtown hotel in New York, a short distance from Trump Tower.

Clinton has booked the glass-enclosed Jacob K Javits Convention Centre, also in New York -- a wink to the "glass ceiling" she would be breaking as the first woman elected to the White House.

BPL kicks off today

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defending champions Comilla Victorians, led by Mashrafe Bin Mortaza, taking on the Darren Sammy-led Rajshahi Kings at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium at 2:30pm. The second match of the opening day will pit Mahmudullah Riyad's Khulna Titans against Rangpur Riders, who will likely be led by Pakistan's mercurial all-rounder Shahid Afridi.

Over the next 36 days, Dhaka and Chittagong will be home to foreign stars from Afghanistan, Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Sri Lanka, West Indies and Pakistan playing for seven franchises. In addition to the teams that will be locked in battle today, last year's runners-up Barisal Bulls, Chittagong Vikings and Dhaka Dynamites will be vying for the coveted trophy and the Tk 2-crore prize money over the next month and five days.

COMILLA VS RAJSHAHI

Comilla seem to have most bases covered, starting with their captain, the inspirational Mashrafe. A strong foreign contingent will stand them in good stead, with teams being allowed a minimum of three and a maximum of four foreign players per match. The opening combination should be one of the stronger ones in the league, with national opener Imrul Kayes expected to pair up with Ahmed Shehzad of Pakistan. It will also be interesting to see how under-19 star Nazmul Hossain fares if picked, while the surprise package in the middle order may be Mohammad Al-Amin, who had a good Dhaka Premier

League season this year.

The bowling will probably be in the hands of Mashrafe, West Indian Test captain Jason Holder, Pakistan's Sohail Tanvir and Afghanistan's excellent leg-spinner Rashid Khan.

With Sammy leading Rajshahi, a fair amount of swag can be expected when they take the field today. Their big drawing point may well be the presence of recent Test hero Mehedi Hasan Miraz, who will be looking to translate his bowling excellence to the shortest format while also reminding viewers that he is more than a capable batsman. Rajshahi's trump card may turn out to be Bangladesh's young tyro Sabbir Rahman, who will be a threat in the middle order.

Rajshahi have a wealth of foreign options, and depending on the pitch they may choose to go in with one among Pakistan speedster Mohammad Sami or West Indies' Kesrick Williams, supported by either or both local pacers Abul Hasan and Ebadat Hossain. Sri Lanka's Upul Tharanga will almost certainly open the batting, while Umar Akmal is expected to make up the foreign contingent.

KHULNA VS RANGPUR

Riyad will lead newcomers Khulna on to the field against a side that will probably be led by one of the most charismatic cricketers in modern times in Afridi, but Khulna will not be lacking in their fair share of flair. And Riyad, with his recent role as Bangladesh's T20 finisher, will be leading the way in that regard. He will have local support from veteran hard-

hitting all-rounder Alok Kapali, while West Indies' Lendl Simmons and Kevon Cooper, both with a fair bit of success in BPLs past, will lend the foreign expertise. Recent Test returnee Shuvagata Hom will also be counted upon to pull his weight with the bat, and also bowl a few overs of off-spin if the pitch demands it. The fast-medium talents of Ben Laughlin from Australia and Benny Howell from England may also be called upon, while Bangladesh pacer Shafiqul Islam is a likely choice to open the bowling.

Rangpur boasts some explosive talent. Local players Soumya Sarkar and Pinak Ghosh, foreigners Mohammad Shehzad from Afghanistan, Nasir Jamshed from Pakistan and West Indies' Under-19 star Gidron Pope will look to form a formidable batting line-up. Afridi will of course be there to brandish his bat like a weapon lower down the order and bring out his fizzing leg breaks when they take the field.

There will be two matches per day in Mirpur up till November 13, with a break on November 7, before the show moves on to Chittagong between November 17 and November 22. BPL will then return to Dhaka for the remainder of the league, with the top two teams eventually playing a qualifier, and the third and fourth-placed teams at the end of the 42-match league phase playing an eliminator. The loser of the qualifier will play the winner of the first eliminator for the right to meet the winner of the qualifier in the final on December 9.