

Dhaka offers to host Bimstec security chiefs' conference

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Bangladesh yesterday offered to host the second meeting of Bimstec's national security chiefs as the seven-nation regional group agreed to enhance cooperation to counter terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation.

Maj Gen (ret'd) Tarique Ahmed Siddique, defence and security adviser to Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, made the offer at the first meeting of the national security chiefs in New Delhi. The offer was welcomed by the other participants.

The meeting noted that Bimstec member countries face common security challenges and underlined the necessity of addressing traditional and non-traditional security challenges to harness economic prosperity and human security in the region.

The meeting underscored the importance of recognising the Bay of Bengal as common security space and agreed to work out collective strategies for common responses, a statement issued by India's Ministry of External Affairs said.

Noting with concern the emerging trends in cyber space that have security implications, the meeting also decided to deepen cooperation among the respective cyber institutions through a joint forum on cyber security.

Yesterday's meeting was convened as per a decision taken in Bimstec Leaders' Retreat held in Goa, India, on October 16 last year, which was attended by Hasina among the top leaders of Bimstec -- Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

Hanif was 'killed for money'

His brother alleges while receiving the body

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Halim Mridha, brother of Hanif Mridha who died in Rab custody hours after being detained near the spot of Friday's suspected suicide blast in Dhaka, yesterday claimed that his brother might have been killed for money.

He made the allegation while talking to reporters at Dhaka Medical College morgue, a day after his family said Hanif was picked up by a group of people claiming to be detectives at Siddhirganj in Narayanganj late last month.

The family also claimed that a little over two weeks after Hanif was picked up, several men in plain-clothes and one in Rab uniform took Hanif to their house on March 15. They forced Hanif to sign two cheques worth Tk 6.70 lakh, and then took him away.

Comment form Rab was not immediately available.

"There was no case against my brother. I think my brother has been killed for his wealth. They took money from him. If he were set free, it could create a problem," Halim said while receiving his brother's body from the morgue.

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Shakib

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"At the outset of my speech, I first congratulate the people of Magura where your golden son and wonder of cricket world Shakib Al Hasan was born," BSS quoted Sheikh Hasina as saying at a public rally in Magura -- the home town of Shakib.

The sport-savvy Hasina was actually showering praise on Shakib for his outstanding all-round performance in the second Test at the P Sara Oval in Colombo that Bangladesh won by four-wickets.

Sheikh Hasina said the Bangladesh cricket team had brought "Joy Bangla's Joy [victory for Joy Bangla]" by defeating Sri Lanka in their century Test match.

"For the historic win, I once again greet all players, coach and officials of the national team including Shakib Al Hasan," she said amid thunderous clapping from the audience.

Shakib and Ashwin had been in a neck-and-neck contest, exchanging the number one spot on two occasions over the past week. However, Shakib reclaimed top spot with a brilliant performance in the second and final Test against Sri Lanka in Colombo. He took six wickets across two innings and scored a match-altering 116 in Bangladesh's first innings.

Date to be fixed

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Provision 991 (VI) of the Jail Code, Helal Uddin Mollah, a defence lawyer, told The Daily Star.

He said the jail authorities would now ask Mufti Hannan and two others Sharif Shahedul Alam Bipul and Delwar Hossain Ripon whether they would seek presidential clemency.

If they do not or if the president rejects their petitions, the jail authorities will execute them, the lawyer said. Attorney General Mahubey Alam told this correspondent that the jail authorities would decide when they would execute the three Harkatul Jihad al Islami (Huji) leaders.

The jail authorities earlier started their execution process after receiving the SC's full verdict that had dismissed their appeals, he said, adding that the execution process was halted after the Huji leaders had filed review petitions.

Additional Registrar of the High Court Sabbir Faiz told The Daily Star that the SC authorities yesterday sent copies of its full verdict to the trial court in Sylhet and the jail authorities.

On March 19, a three-member bench of the Appellate Division of the SC headed by Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha dismissed the petitions filed by Hannan, Bipul and Ripon seeking reviews of the SC's previous verdict upholding their death sentences.

In the verdict, the judges said, "The incident was so brutal that no one could harbour any doubt that the accused had not intended to kill the

high commissioner. But incidentally he survived with grievous injury and other persons who accompanied him succumbed to injuries of explosions. While maintaining the conviction, this court was of the view that clause 'Fourthly' of section 300 of the Penal Code attracted in the case, that is to say, the accused committed the incident which was so imminently dangerous that it must in all probability may cause death. The learned counsel fails to point out any error of law in the judgment of this court. We find no merit in these petitions."

In 2004, then UK envoy Anwar Chowdhury, who was born in Bangladesh, and 70 others were injured in the attack at the shrine of Hazrat Shahjalal (RA) in Sylhet. Three people, including a police official, were killed.

On December 23, 2008, the Sylhet Divisional Speedy Trial Tribunal sentenced Mufti Hannan, Bipul and Ripon to death. Two other members of the banned militant outfit were sentenced to life in jail. They are Muhibullah alias Muhibur Rahman alias Ovi and Mufti Main Uddin alias Abu Zandal.

On February 11 last year, the HC confirmed the capital punishment for the three and upheld the life sentences of Ovi and Abu Zandal.

On December 7 last year, the SC upheld the death penalties of Hannan, Bipul and Ripon.

The trio filed petitions for reviews on February 23 this year.

Deal unlikely

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Singh and incumbent Prime Minister Narendra Modi made their commitment to signing the deal during their respective visits to Bangladesh, he added.

Manmohan could not make it happen, but Modi was expected to do it, the minister told the roundtable on "Turning Wastewater into Wealth." He attended the programme as the chief guest to celebrate the World Water Day to be observed across the globe today.

Asked about any possible diplomatic failure, the minister trashed the idea at the roundtable jointly organised by Bhorer Kagoj, End Water Poverty, Fresh Water Action Network, South Asia Bangladesh, NGO Forum for Public Health and Water Supply and Sanitation Collaboration Council.

"All of you know that they [India] have some problems in signing this deal. But their prime minister and their people are very cordial about it. So, we hope this will be resolved soon and the deal will be signed," he reiterated.

The Teesta treaty was drafted in 2010 and was supposed to be inked during Manmohan's visit to Bangladesh in 2011. But it did not happen as Chief Minister of Bengal Mamata Banerjee refused to come to Dhaka with Manmohan, raising her objection to the treaty at the last leg of the visit.

Modi came to Dhaka on a 34-hour trip to take bilateral relations to a new level on June 6, 2015.

Bangladesh expected that Modi would bring Mamata on board by offering her a fiscal package to revive cash-strapped Bengal and the Teesta

deal would be signed. But that also did not happen.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is going to visit India on April 7-10 at the invitation of Modi, but the fate of signing of the deal remains uncertain.

The water resources minister informed the reporters that Dhaka and Delhi were in discussion over the Ganga barrage and Bangladesh wanted to build it at Pangsha in Rajbari.

The minister acknowledged that Bangladesh was also deprived of a fair share of water because of the Farakka dam. He also pointed out that the rivers are unable to store water due to poor maintenance and deposit of silt.

"The government has prioritised dredging work on the rivers to reserve the flow of water," he said.

Prof Mujibur Rahman of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet) gave the keynote presentation on "Wastewater Management: From Disposal to Resource Recovery."

More than 80 percent wastewater generated globally flows back into the ecosystem without being treated or reused, he said, adding that 8.42 lakh deaths were caused for unsafe water, poor sanitation and unhygienic atmosphere.

In Bangladesh, around 92 percent wastewater is being seriously neglected, he noted.

Around 2.1 crore people in Bangladesh are still drinking unsafe water, said Alok Majumder, country coordinator of Wash Alliance.

Bhorer Kagoj editor Shamol Dutta moderated the programme addressed by Water Resources Senior Secretary Jafar Ahmed Khan, among others.

Jewel isn't dead

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Based on that information, Rab members picked up Jewel's parents and five other family members from their village home in Faridpur for interrogation, said Rab sources.

Following the incident, several media outlets reported that the "suicide bomber" could be Jewel.

Later, Rab men went to Jewel's home in Dohar in Dhaka district and talked to his wife, who told the force that Jewel was alive. The law enforcers then talked to Jewel by phone and asked him to meet them.

Jewel, however, switched of his phone, prompting the Rab to launch a hunt for him, said the Rab sources.

On Monday, Jewel suddenly turned himself before some media outlets in the capital, saying he did not go to the Rab feeling insecure by the turn of events.

"I want security. They [Rab] have made me a dead person but I want to live," he said nervously while talking to a private TV station, adding that he kept his phone switched off out of fear. "I am completely innocent."

total image of the first fingerprint. The condition of the other one was slightly better."

Asked, Shaidul said that they had an agreement with Rab to help identify militants, they gave the information to the law enforcers.

He also said it was "next to impossible" to misuse fingerprints stored in the "secured" EC database in case any NID card was lost.

Jewel, who works at a hospital in Munshiganj, said he lost his NID while travelling in Jatrabari area five to six years ago. He tried to file a general diary (GD), but the local police did not register it as he had collected the card from Faridpur.

"I did not give any importance to the matter. I used to do all my work using my passports," he said.

He said on Friday he learnt that Rab officials picked up his parents along with other family members from their village home and took them to the Rab office in Faridpur.

The next day, he went to his Dohar home from Munshiganj and came to know from his wife that some Rab men were looking for him. As asked, he called the Rab and said he was not the suicide bomber. However, the law enforcers did not "believe him and asked him to meet them".

Gaibandha-1 by-polls today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gaibandha

A by-election will be held today in the constituency of Gaibandha-1, which fell vacant following the murder of ruling Awami League lawmaker Manzurul Islam Liton in December last year.

Seven candidates are vying for the post including AL-nominated Golam Mostafa Ahmed and Jatiya Party-nominated Barrister Shamim Haider Patwari. Over 3.33 lakh voters are expected to cast their ballots.

Additional law enforcers will be present at 54 "important" polling stations out of the total 109, said Returning Officer GM Shahatab Uddin.

Over 1,850 law enforcers, seven Border Guard Bangladesh platoons and 27 executive magistrates will be deployed alongside seven patrol boats in remote shoal areas, said police and district authorities.

Liton was killed after unknown assailants opened fire on him inside his home at Sundarganj upazila on December 31. The Election Commission announced the polls schedule on February 5.

Trump will resign 'soon', says top Democrat

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Donald Trump is going to "get himself out of office soon", a leading Democratic senator has claimed.

Dianne Feinstein suggested the President would quit before he was potentially forced out of office after anti-Trump protesters in Los Angeles demanded to know why more wasn't being done by Congress to remove him from office.

"We know he is breaking the law every day," a protester asked the 83-year-old political veteran. "He has obvious dealings with Russia. There's so many things he's doing that are unconstitutional. How are we going to get him out?"

Hinting she might know more than she is able to let on, Ms Feinstein, who sits on the House Judiciary Committee, replied: "We have a lot of people looking into this. I think he's going to get himself out."

10 govt officials

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in the ecologically critical area of St Martin's Island without environmental clearance certificate.

The HC bench of Justice Md Ashfaque Islam and Justice Ashish Ranjan Das came up with the rule following a contempt of court petition filed by Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (Bela).

Citing the petition, Sayeed Ahmed Kabir, a lawyer of Bela, told The Daily Star that the HC on October 24, 2011, had directed the respondents to pull down the buildings on the island, which have no environmental clearance certificates, within 60 days after receiving the court order to protect the island's natural diversity.

Till October 2011, 74 unauthorised structures had been constructed on St Martin's Island, which was declared an ecologically critical area in 1999, he said.

Following an application filed by Bela under the Right to Information Act, the Chittagong office of the Department of Environment informed Bela on February 2 this year that 106 unauthorised structures, including hotels and motels, have so far been built there without having any environmental clearance certificate, the lawyer added.

Bela recently filed the contempt of court petition against the respondents for not demolishing and preventing construction of such buildings on St Martin's Island as per the HC directive.

Ganges

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polluted with untreated sewage and industrial waste.

Evidence found

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"The case is slightly different. For the first time, evidence of war-time offence has been found against an army official who was working in Pakistan army during the war," said Sanaul Huq, co-coordinator of the agency, at a press conference at its Dhanmondi office.

Shahidullah, aged 75, was arrested on August 2 last year after the tribunal issued a warrant for his arrest. He has been in jail since then.

The investigation officer of the case, ZM Altafur Rahman yesterday handed over the probe report, statements of witnesses and other documents to the Chief Prosecutor Office.

The prosecution will now scrutinise the documents and press charges against Shahidullah for trial if they find the evidence convincing, Prosecutor Abul Kalam said.

Earlier in January, Co-coordinator Sanaul Huq told reporters that the agency was investigating two former Bangalee army officials' affiliation with the Pakistan army and links to war crimes.

One of them is Shahidullah. No details were provided about the other accused.

In January last year, the agency said it had formed a special committee to gather information about the Pakistani prisoners of war (PoWs) and their involvement in crimes during the Liberation War.

The move was made at a time when calls for putting 195 Pakistani PoWs, repatriated following a tripartite agreement in 1974, on trial are getting louder and experts finding no legal bar to bringing them to book.

However, a decision is yet to be made whether a formal investigation will be launched against the Pakistani soldiers, Abdul Hannan Khan, coordinator of the agency, told The Daily Star yesterday.

WHO IS SHAHIDULLAH?

Speaking of Shahidullah's links to the Pakistani army, he said that as Shahidullah joined the Pakistani army,

Evidence found

he was posted to the then West Pakistan. But he came to his Comilla's home before the war broke out on March 26, 1971.

Shahidullah joined the Pakistani army at Dhaka Cantonment and later went to Comilla Cantonment. He along with other army men set up a camp at Daudkandi sadar and tortured and killed civilians.

"During our investigation, we have found that he [Shahidullah] was a captain in the army. However, we did not get any record from army," Hannan said.

Sanaul Huq said Shahidullah had "willingly" sided with the Pakistan army though participating in war was not mandatory for him.

Since he didn't join Bangladesh Army after the birth of this country, he can be legally termed as "absconding army man", he added.

The probe agency has information about three incidents that Shahidullah allegedly had links with.

On June 7, 1971, he along with 8-10 Pakistani army men abducted Habibur Rahman, a physician, tortured him at the camp and subsequently killed him on the bank of the Gomti river before dumping his body there.

On June 16 that year, Shahidullah accompanied by 40-50 men attacked his own village Golaperchar and Chengakandi, picked up 20 unarmed people, and looted and torched five houses.

Of them, 19 were released as they pledged to give information about freedom fighters. The other one was shot dead by Shahidullah himself on the bank of the Gomti river.

On July 21, the accused along with some other Pakistani army men attacked Daudkandi Bazar, picked up Kala Mia, a pro-liberation man, tortured him and then shot him dead behind Chandina Hospital in Comilla.

The investigation agency in its report named 22 prosecution witnesses who would testify against Shahidullah.

UN official tells

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Muslim minority have left in this fashion, and their treatment may amount to "crimes against humanity," warns UN Special Rapporteur Yanghee Lee.

"When there's 77,000 people running away from their home towns, leaving everything ... the international community should really step up to the plate," she told CNN.

Lee has visited northern Rakhine State, which has been largely off limits to journalists and NGO workers since early October, and spoken to many refugees.

"What really struck me was when old men started to break down in tears in front of me and sob," she said, when interviewed on CNN's Newstream on Monday. "(They were) telling me they've seen their whole family killed in front of their eyes."

Myanmar government spokeswoman Aye Aye Soe said the administration is "deeply concerned by reports of potential human rights abuses and have already set up an Investigation Commission led by Vice President U Myint Swe."

The Myanmar government did not respond to a request for comment about Lee's claims. In a 4,000-word statement given to CNN in February, Aye Aye Soe denied allegations of human rights abuses in Rakhine.

"What is happening in Rakhine now is only security clearance sweeps being carried out with restraint and within rules and regulations against armed perpetrators," she said. "The instigators are using this situation to portray a disproportionate picture of 'genocide' and 'ethnic cleansing'."

The violence began on October 9, when according to state media, a group of around 300 armed men attacked soldiers and police, sparking an intense crackdown by the Myanmar military.

"We attacked them using our machetes, swords, and knives, and we seized their weapons to use against them," Atah Ullah -- leader of the Harakat al-Yaqeen, or "Faith Movement," which carried out the

attack -- told CNN earlier this year.

"We, the vulnerable and persecuted people, have asked the international community for protection against the atrocities by the government of Myanmar, but the international community turned its back on us," he said.

"Finally, we cannot take it anymore."

With the Myanmar military arresting hundreds of people in Rakhine, deploying attack helicopters and allegedly setting fire to villages, thousands of Rohingya refugees have poured over the border to camps in Bangladesh.

Amnesty International said it has documented "a wide range of human rights violations" since the crackdown began, while Human Rights Watch accused the military of "numerous abuses ... including widespread arson, extrajudicial killings, and systematic rape and other sexual violence."

In a piece for CNN Opinion in Thailand, Matthew Smith of Dhaka-based Fortify Rights warned that the world may be "watching a possible genocide unfold" in Rakhine.

"I would not use (the word genocide) right now but it could amount to crimes against humanity," said Lee.

She called on the international community to "walk the talk" on Myanmar, adding that Aung San Suu Kyi -- the country's long term democracy icon and de facto head of state -- "could and should speak up a little more."

Suu Kyi has been widely criticised for failing to address alleged human rights abuses in Rakhine. Suu Kyi has asked for more "time and space" to resolve the problems, and many have pointed out that the country's military, rather than the civilian government, oversees the region.

"It is important that the Investigation Commission is allowed to complete its work, and to demonstrate that Myanmar's own institutions are able to address our human rights challenges," Aye Aye Soe said.

"In the meantime, we will continue to seek long term solutions to bring about lasting peace and stability in Rakhine."

5 'Neo JMB militants'

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and public support, said Col Anwar. Graduating in 2012 from the electrical and electronic engineering department of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (Buet), he had joined a telecommunications company, he added.

Anwarul graduated from the chemical engineering department the same year, is an expert in making bombs and was at present working as a teacher at a coaching centre in the capital, mentioned the official.

A relative of Harkat-ul-Jihad al-Islami, Bangladesh (Huji-B) chief Mufti Abdul Hannan, Saleh joined the "Sarwar-Tamim group" through Oliuzzaman and used to collect funds from the members upon Oliuzzaman's instructions, claimed Col Anwar.