

PM to visit Cambodia Dec 3-5

2 agreements, 9 MoUs to be signed

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will visit Cambodia on December 3-5 to further expand and strengthen trade relations and economic cooperation between the two countries.

During the tour, the two countries will ink two agreements and nine memorandums of understanding (MoUs) to strengthen bilateral cooperation, said foreign ministry officials.

Addressing a press conference at the ministry yesterday morning, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali said the deals would focus on collaboration among top businesses and flight operations of private airlines of the two countries.

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Islamic scholars against militancy

They will hand over letter to Pope today

PORIMOL PALMA

A group of Islamic scholars will hand over a letter, containing signatures of more than 100,000 imams, against religious extremism to Pope Francis as he meets interfaith leaders at the Ramna Cathedral today.

"This is a gesture showing that we are against Islamic extremism and militancy," said Mazharul Islam, convener of Religious Harmony Forum and grand khatib of Ambarshah Shahi Jame Mosque in the city's Karwan Bazar.

He said some 350 Islamic religious leaders, led by Bangladesh Jamiyatul Ulama Chairman Farid Uddin Masud, would join the gathering of 5,500 religious leaders from Muslim, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist communities for a dialogue to promote harmony and peace.

Pope Francis' visit to Bangladesh comes amid the fastest growing

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Two held on rape charge

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhalakathi

Two people, including Rajapur upazila unit Sramik League secretary, were arrested early yesterday in connection with raping a housewife in Rajapur upazila town.

The arrestees are Sramik League leader Monir Howlader and Siddiq Hossain, said Shamsul Areefin, officer-in-charge of Rajapur Police Station.

The victim filed a case against five people, including Monir and Siddiq, with the police station on Wednesday night. Police then detained Monir in Rajapur upazila town and Siddiq in Bhandaria municipality of Pirojpur, the police official said.

According to the case statement, the five accused entered the house of the woman in Medical intersection area of Rajapur upazila town on Wednesday afternoon and raped her.

Her physically challenged husband was in another room at that time, the statement said.

The OC said they were trying to arrest the other accused.

The woman was sent to Jhalakathi Sadar Hospital for her medical tests.

A study, conducted by rights body Ain o Salish Kendra, says 512 women or girl child became victims of rape or attempted rape between January and September in 2016.

In the same time in 2017, the number of such victims was 588.

Cops raid

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under control".

The half-day hartal ended yesterday with no major incidents of violence.

Vehicular movement was normal in the capital and elsewhere. Police did not let the pro-hartal activists take to the streets in many areas.

Meanwhile, at least 12 people were injured as police swooped on a pro-hartal rally at a level crossing in Gaibandha town around 11:00am, reports our district correspondent.

The CPB and its allies will hold nationwide demonstrations today in protest of the CPB office raid.

CPB, Bangladesh Samajtantrik Dal and other left-leaning parties called the hartal after the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission on November 23 raised the power tariff by 5.3 percent.

The BNP also supported the hartal. Mahmudul Haque, officer-in-charge of Paltan Police Station, told this correspondent that police did not conduct any raid in the CPB office.

Police picked up 11 people as they were trying to block the road in front of the CPB office, but they were later freed, he added.



DNCC Mayor Annisul Huq, right, speaks at The Daily Star Centre on May 23, 2015, while DSCC Mayor Sayeed Khokon looks on. The just elected Dhaka city mayors were invited to talk about their future plans. FILE PHOTO

Mayor Annisul Huq passes away

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cerebral vasculitis.

Annisul was showing some improvements lately, but his condition deteriorated suddenly on Tuesday and had been shifted to the intensive care unit.

"I lost a brother, good friend and a committed businessman," said Anwar ul Alam Chowdhury Parvez, former BGMEA president and a long-time friend of Annisul, in his instant reaction.

A successful entrepreneur and businessman, Annisul left behind a host of relatives, admirers, well-wishers and followers to mourn his death.

As the news spread, people started mourning his death in public and on social media.

President Abdul Hamid, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, BNP Chairperson Khaleida Zia, Finance Minister AMA Muhith, Cultural Affairs Minister Asaduzzaman Noor, Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader, Law Minister Annisul Huq and Information Minister Hasanul Haq Inu, among others, condoled his death and expressed sympathy for the bereaved family.

His first namaz-e-janaza (funeral prayers) will be held at Regent Part Central mosque in London after Juma prayers, family sources said.

His body will be brought to Dhaka on a Bangladesh Biman flight tomorrow. His second funeral prayers will be held at the Army Stadium after Asr prayers the same day. He is expected to be buried at Banani graveyard.

From an ordinary middleclass man, Annisul turned himself into one of the leading businesspersons of the country. From a little known struggler, he rose to the zenith of prominence, to a household name.

With such a fairytale-like success story to his name, he took up the challenge to give Dhaka city a complete facelift, to make it green, clean and healthy by contesting the mayoral election.

Annisul came out victorious in the elections held in 2015, and was in the middle his mission to bring about qualitative changes in delivering civic services with the slogan "Clean Dhaka, Green Dhaka".

But his sudden death put an end to the mission of the would-be successful

mayor.

Born in 1952, Annisul graduated with honours in Economics from Rajshahi University.

He established his own business in 1986 and was the chairperson of nine export-oriented organisations under the trade name of Mohammadi Group, which directly employs about 12,000 people in garment sector alone.

He worked alongside his family, most notably his wife Rubana Huq, who is the managing director of Mohammadi Group. The Group is set to launch a private television channel, Nagorik TV.

Once a popular television personality, Annisul held important positions in some local and international organisations.

He was president of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) from 2005 to 2006, Saarc Chamber of Commerce and Industries from 2010 to 2012, Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI) from 2008 to 2010 and Bangladesh Independent Power Producers Association (BIPPA).

Onion price slightly down

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the Bangladeshi markets and the prices here spiralled, putting people in trouble.

"Onions have become too expensive," Saiful Islam, who works at a private firm, had said after buying half a kg for Tk 50, a few days ago.

Onion prices which also rocketed outside the capital have started to drop.

For example, each kg of locally-grown and imported onions were selling for Tk 80 and Tk 65 in the kitchen markets in Dinajpur. They were higher the day before yesterday.

A week ago, the price of per kg of the imported ones was Tk 58.

Sirajul Islam, who runs a small restaurant in Dinajpur, said, "My family runs on the profit [of my business]. How can I do business if the price stays so high?"

Sheikh Ali Ahmed, a retired banker living in Khulna city, said he was struggling to meet his family expenses as the

prices of other essentials, including rice, were too high.

Onion prices started soaring since flood hit the northern region of the country in August. That month, per kg of onions was sold at just Tk 25 per, said Asadul Islam, who lives in Dinajpur.

Prices shot up further by the end of September and each kg of the imported onions was sold at Tk 65 in mid-October.

There was further price hike following crop loss in heavy rains in the neighbouring country.

Downpour also affected early varieties of locally grown onions at a time when old stocks were running out.

"Onion prices may remain at this level for another week," Narayan Chandra Saha, a wholesaler at Shyambazar market in the capital, said a few days ago.

Harun Ur Rashid, president of Importers and Exporters Group of Hili

Land Port, said onion prices were soaring in the Indian domestic market. Besides, bad weather and flood in August also damaged onion fields, he said.

Harun said traders were losing interest in importing onions from India because of the \$850 MEP.

Importers could import onions at \$500 per tonne prior to India's move, according to traders.

The latest MEP for onion exports will remain effective until December 31, the Director General of Foreign Trade under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of India said in a notification on November 23.

Narayan said prices of onions may drop in the coming months because of arrival of early varieties of locally grown bulbs.

"We are also getting onions imported from China and Egypt."

Harun urged the Bangladesh government to facilitate faster import of bulb onions from other countries.

Trump angers UK

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videos posted by Jayda Fransen, deputy leader of the group Britain First.

May criticised him, her spokesman saying: "It is wrong for the president to have done this."

Fransen, who was convicted this month of abusing a Muslim woman and whose group wants to ban Islam, is facing further criminal charges of racially aggravated harassment.

"We have been clear: President Donald Trump was wrong to retweet videos by far-right group Britain First," Home Secretary (interior minister) Amber Rudd told parliament.

Islamist militants have carried out several major attacks in Britain this year that have killed a total of 36 people, including a bombing in Manchester and two attacks on bridges in London in which victims were rammed with vehicles and stabbed.

May was on a trip to the Middle East and has not directly responded herself to Trump's barbed tweet.

SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP

Trump initially addressed his tweet to a Twitter handle that was not May's, though he later retweeted to the British leader's correct account.

Always a pillar of Britain's foreign policy, the so-called "special relationship" with Washington has taken on added importance as Britain prepares to leave the European Union in 2019. Since Trump became president, May has gone out of her way to cultivate a good relationship with him.

She was the first foreign leader to visit him after his inauguration, and

they were filmed emerging from the White House holding hands.

She later said that Trump took her hand in a gentlemanly gesture as they walked down a ramp.

But she angered Trump's many critics in Britain then by extending an invitation to make a state visit to Britain with all the pomp and pageantry it brings including a formal banquet with Queen Elizabeth.

Despite repeated calls from opposition lawmakers to cancel this, Rudd said the invitation still stood although a timing had not been agreed. She also said the close US-British relationship which allowed the intelligence agencies to share information was vital and had saved lives.

RACIST

Brendan Cox, the husband of lawmaker Jo Cox who was murdered in 2016 by a far-right extremist and Justin Welby, the spiritual head of the Anglican Church, were among those expressing outrage at Trump's latest tweet.

Lawmakers from the across the political divide were also united in condemnation.

"By sharing it, he is either a racist, incompetent or unthinking, or all three," opposition Labour lawmaker Stephen Doughty said. Britain's Middle East minister Alistair Burt tweeted: "The White House tweets are both alarming and despairing tonight. This is so not where the world needs to go."

The videos shared by Trump purported to show a group of people who

were Muslims beating a teenage boy to death, battering a boy on crutches and destroying a Christian statue.

Reuters was unable to verify the videos. The Dutch embassy in Washington issued a Twitter comment on one of them, which Fransen had described as showing a "Muslim migrant" beating up a boy.

"@realDonaldTrump Facts do matter. The perpetrator of the violent act in this video was born and raised in the Netherlands," the embassy said. "He received and completed his sentence under Dutch law."

London's Muslim mayor Sadiq Khan, who has been embroiled in previous Twitter spats with Trump, called for the state visit offer to be withdrawn. "After this latest incident, it is increasingly clear that any official visit at all from President Trump to Britain would not be welcomed," he said on Twitter.

The White House defended the retweets by the Republican president, who during the 2016 US election campaign called for "a total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States", saying that he was raising security issues.

It repeatedly refused to be drawn into the content of the videos or whether Trump was aware of the source of the tweets.

"It's about ensuring that individuals who come into the United States don't pose a public safety or terrorism threat," White House spokesman Raj Shah told reporters aboard Air Force One.

WOMEN, CHILDREN REPRESSION

Govt to form 41 more tribunals

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina approved formation of 41 new Nari O Shishu Nirjaton Daman (Women and Children Repression Prevention) Tribunals in different districts across the country in order to quickly dispose of cases filed involving women and children.

Currently there are 54 such tribunals dealing with the cases.

More than 1.5 lakh such cases are now pending with lower courts across the country, Supreme Court sources said.

The premier also approved 246 posts of judges and staff for the newly created tribunals and their equipments including transportation, a law ministry press release said, adding that the relevant documents reached the law

ministry on Wednesday.

Contacted Law Minister Anisul Huq told The Daily Star yesterday that the government will very soon appoint the judges and staff for the new tribunals.

He hoped that the rate of disposal of the cases filed involving women and children will increase.

Earlier in August of last year, the finance division of the finance ministry gave consent to the law ministry's proposal for creating the 246 posts along with approving the necessary equipment and transportation.

According to the finance division's consent letter, there are no tribunals in the 12 districts of Rajbari, Gopalganj, Magura, Feni, Laxmipur, Khagrachhari, Lalmonirhat, Joypurhat, Chuadanga, Meherpur, Pirojpur and Bhola.

It's a pride for the nation

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long-term plans to meet the demand. The total electricity production capacity has now risen to nearly 16,000 megawatt. About 83 percent people have come under electricity coverage.

"We'll get 1,200 megawatt electricity from the Rooppur power plant by 2023 and another 1,200 megawatt by the following year. Nearly 10 percent of the total produced electricity will come from the nuclear energy source by that time."

Hasina said her government gave top priority to nuclear safety and radiological protections in implementing the power plant project. "We're strictly following International Atomic Energy Association safety standards and other relevant guidelines as well as the international good practices."

"We've promulgated Bangladesh Atomic Energy Regulatory Act, 2012 to strengthen national nuclear regulatory infrastructure to ensure safe and secured applications to nuclear techniques and building the country's first nuclear power plant."

The PM said Bangladesh's nuclear energy programme was very transparent. The country signed all the major international treaties, agreements and protocols related to nuclear non-proliferation, she added.

Hasina said the design of the Rooppur power plant was developed in such a way that it would not lead to any accident, be it caused by nature or human beings.

"We've also taken proper initiatives for training of manpower for safe operation of the plant. Measures have also been taken so that it does not cause any harm to human beings and environment."

She said one of the main concerns of any nuclear power plant is its waste management. Under a deal signed with Russia in this regard, the country would take the waste, the PM told the programme.

Science and Technology Minister Yafesh Osman, PM's Economic Affairs Adviser Moshir Rahman, Energy Adviser Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury, Security Adviser Major General (ret) Tariq Ahmed Siddiqui, Army Chief General Abu Belal Muhammad Shafiq Huq, Russian Ambassador to

Bangladesh Alexander Ignatov, Russian state-run atomic energy body Rosatom Director General Alexey Likhachev and Chief Engineer of Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC) Md Abdur Razzak were present, among others.

ROSATOM DG MEETS PM

Earlier in the day, Rosatom DG Likhachev met the prime minister at its Rooppur office.

Likhachev congratulated Hasina for taking initiatives to build the nuclear power plant, PM's Press Secretary Ihsanul Karim told reporters after the meeting.

The Rosatom official said India might join the power plant project.

Hasina thanked Russian President Vladimir Putin for providing assistance to the construction of the power plant.

Mentioning that Bangladesh has special relations with Russia, the PM recalled Moscow's contributions to the Liberation War in 1971.

The Rooppur plant is expected to supply 2,400 MW electricity to the national grid by 2024, helping the country meet its growing demand for electricity.

The mega project is being implemented by state-run BAEC under the science and technology ministry, with technical and technological support from Rosatom.

The BAEC and Russian firm JSC Atomstroyexport had inked a contract for the construction of the power plant on December 25, 2015.

Atomstroyexport, the contractor appointed by Rosatom, will build the power plant at a cost of \$12.65 billion.

The Bangladesh government on November 2, 2011, signed a deal with Rosatom to construct the nuclear plant on 262 acres of land.

Russia will provide all assistance under the agreement for setting up the plant, including providing the fuel and taking back the used fuel.

Hasina had laid the foundation stone of the power plant on October 2, 2013.

The government on December 15, 2015 had finalised the amount for the biggest-ever investment project in the country's history by striking an initial agreement with Russia.

'Bribery at every step'

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the country. Such double leadership, corruption, and long delays in getting justice create risk for ensuring true freedom of the judiciary, it said.

The lower courts should be solely controlled by the Supreme Court, the study recommended, adding that the government has to employ adequate manpower, build necessary infrastructure, and provide sufficient logistics and modern technological support to the courts.

The appointment of judges, lawyers and other employees of the courts should be fast, corruption-free, transparent and free of political influence. Their activities and behaviours must be monitored strictly, it recommended.

It also recommended publishing the gazette of the lower judges' disciplinary rules and code of conduct, taking immediate and strong action against corruption, making mandatory for all courts to publish annual reports, annual audit and publishing it on a website, and providing adequate financial allocation.

According to the study, the lawyers or their assistants demand more money from their clients than the fixed fees. Even after taking bribes, they do not complete the tasks timely, said the study.

Some lawyers delay legal proceedings intentionally and do not provide necessary information to their clients, it said.

"Sometimes lawyers and public prosecutors collude and not conduct the legal proceedings of cases prop-

erly," it added.

There were accusations that court employees lobby for transfers and seekers of jobs at the courts pay Tk 3 lakh to Tk 20 lakh for their employment.

Citing shortage of 114 judges and 579 court employees at the courts under the study, the TIB said, "The number of cases is increasing gradually, but the courts do not have enough manpower...."

"As a result, the courts have to take up a heavy workload which delays finishing tasks."

To reduce the load, many officials employ people unofficially and pay them with the money made from corrupt practices, it said.

The study also found that some of the courts have not had financial audits done in many years.

There was no effective mechanism to ensure accountability and monitor activities and behaviours of lawyers and other law officials, it said.

The TIB also mentioned poor infrastructure and shortage of adequate buildings, rooms and logistics as barriers to the courts' institutional capacity.

The study said justice seekers on many occasions get cheated by brokers and unlicensed people practicing law on court areas.

Speaking at the press conference yesterday, TIB Executive Director Iftekharuzzaman said the law ministry administers the courts, so ultimately it is responsible for the issues.

TIB Chairperson Sultana Kamal and researchers of the study also spoke at the conference.