Indian Foreign Secy in Dhaka

# Dhaka, Delhi to sign two deals

JAGARAN CHAKMA

Two deals, involving Tk 50 crore, will be signed between Bangladesh and India today during the two-day visit of Indian Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale.

The deals will be on two projects -establishment of computer and language lab at 905 primary schools across the country and rehabilitation and improvement of roads in Rangpur City Corporation. Each of the projects cost will be Tk 25 crore.

Economic Relations Division (ERD) Secretary Kazi Shofiqul Azam and Indian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Harsh Vardhan Shringla will sign the deals on behalf of their respective governments at State Guest House Padma. Gokhale, who arrived in Dhaka yesterday, will be present at the signing ceremony.

two projects will be implemented

with the funds from the Indian government.

India is interested in providing grants to help familiarise students with various computer applications and enhance their reading habits. Students will get the opportunity to acquire important IT skills through the effective use of computers from their school lives, the official said.

He said under the computer and language lab project, at least four to five desktop computers and necessary furniture would be provided for each of 905 schools.

Under the project of rehabilitation and improvement of roads in Rangpur city, a road network will be established to improve the city's road communications. It would help reduce traffic jams in

the city, the official said.

On April 11 in 2013, an memoran-According to an ERD official, the dum of understanding (MoU) was SEE PAGE 13 COL 6



Bangladesh Foreign Secretary Md Shahidul Haque, right, receives his Indian counterpart Vijay Keshav Gokhale at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital. PHOTO: PID

## Myanmar not ready for repatriation

Says top UN official on Rohingya issue

REUTERS, Yangon

Myanmar is not ready for the repatriation of Rohingya refugees, said the most senior United Nations official to visit the country this year, after Myanmar was accused of instigating ethnic cleansing and driving nearly 700,000 Muslims to Bangladesh.

"From what I've seen and heard from people - no access to health services, concerns about protection, continued displacements - conditions are not conducive to return," Ursula Mueller, UN's Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, said after a six-day visit to Myanmar.

A Myanmar government spokesman did not immediately respond to requests for comment on Mueller's remarks.

The Myanmar government has previously pledged to do its best to make sure repatriation under an agreement signed with Bangladesh in November would

be "fair, dignified and safe".

Myanmar has so far verified several hundred Rohingya Muslim refugees for possible repatriation. The group would be "the first batch" of refugees and could come back to Myanmar "when it was convenient for them," a Myanmar official said last month.

Mueller was granted rare access in

Myanmar, allowed to visit the most

affected areas in Rakhine state, and met army-controlled ministers of defence and border affairs, as well as de-facto leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other civilian officials. The exodus of Rohingya Muslims followed an August 25 crackdown by

the military in the northwestern Rakhine state. Rohingya refugees reported killings, burnings, looting and rape, in response to militant attacks on security forces.

"I asked (Myanmar officials) to end the violence ... and that the return of

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#### Land ministry

He then faked a sale process and for this showed his father-in-law and a former BSMMU professor as buyers and one Nazmul Islam Sayeed as the person with power of attorney.

The whole episode took place between October 1999 and August

The ACC later found that neither his father-in-law nor the former professor were in possession of the land. Rather, Kutub was living in a tin-shed house built there.

Nazmul was also made accused in the case, filed by the ACC deputy director yesterday.

The plot is part of 31.34 acres of land that Rajuk began acquiring in 1963-64 for the expansion of Gulshan-Baridhara residential model

In 1969, considering that the project would not be profitable, Rajuk decided to give back the land to their owners and asked the deputy commissioner's office to take necessary steps.

Upon Rajuk's request, the land ministry ordered returning the land, and many affected people gave back the compensation money they had got because of the land acquisition.

Later in 1977, Rajuk once again decided to acquire the land and the

ministry cancelled its previous order. The High Court, however, declared illegal the cancellation of the ministry order following a petition filed by one Khademul Islam Chowdhury.

Kutub then had the ministry issue the three gazette notifications by misusing his power, the ACC found.

Rajuk filed a petition with the HC against the gazette notifications and the court declared the ministry steps illegal. Land owners filed petitions with the HC and the Supreme Court, but their appeals were rejected.

After that Rajuk got ownership of the land.

### Schoolgirl

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Instead, they took her to a Sal forest in the upazila by motorcycle and gang-raped her there. They fled the spot, leaving the girl in the forest, the OC said.

Upon hearing her cry for help, passersby rescued the girl and informed her parents about the incident, he added.

After the case was filed, the girl was sent to M Abdur Rahim Medical College Hospital in Dinajpur for medical tests.

8-YEAR-OLD GIRL RAPED An eight-year-old child was allegedly raped by her private tutor at her home in Jahangirnagar area of Goabari in Sylhet Sadar upazila on

April 2, reports our Sylhet correspon-Mosharraf Hossain, officer-incharge of Airport Police Station said they arrested Mahin Miah, 20, of the same area, on Saturday night after a

him of the rape. Quoting the child's father, the OC said the girl is a student of class one in a local madrasa. She began taking private lessons from Mahin Mia on

case was filed that evening accusing

April 1. The very next day, Mahin raped the child when he came to her house to give tuition. She later described the

incident to her mother. Her mother informed her father as soon as she learned of the incident. Her father was in Cumilla at the time. He returned to Sylhet on Friday and admitted the child to One-stop Crisis Centre (OCC) of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital,

the OC said.

He added that the father filed a case, with the OCC report in hand, on Saturday evening. Police arrested Mahin from his house that night.

MPs fume over road condition

Besides, a committee has been formed to determine which method --concretebased or bitumen-based -- should be used for constructing roads and highways by the government, he told report-

Kamal said the meeting was con-

FROM PAGE 1

vened as the prime minister had long been saying that she was facing questions about the quality of roads in some places and she, on several occasions, asked how the longevity of roads could be extended. Abul Kalam Azad, chairman of the

parliamentary standing committee on planning, told the meeting that they visited Malaysia in 2016 and gave observations after seeing the roads and highways there. "But we don't find any reflection [of our observation] in the construction of

roads and highways in Bangladesh," a meeting source quoted Azad as saying. He said they have to visit a number of districts where the road conditions are very poor. In many cases, roads fall

construction. "How will we respond to the taxpay-

into disrepair six months into their

ers," he was quoted as saying. Major (retd) Rafiqul Islam, Bir Uttam, chairman of the standing committee on the shipping ministry, told the meeting that people expect that once a road is constructed, it will be usable for at least five years. Instead, they are damaged within a year.

Even school students questioned him about the short lifespan of the roads, he said. "People are suspecting that we mis-

appropriate money from road construction...people often raise questions about our integrity," a meeting source quoted Rafiqul as saying. He said some factories produced

low-quality bitumen while some people imported low-quality bitumen. He recommended closing such bitumen factories. JSD lawmaker Nazmul Haque

Prodhan said people suspect corruption took place during road construction. Roads have to be built keeping longevity in mind, he said. CONCRETE OR BITUMEN?

After the meeting, Mustafa Kamal said a committee had been formed to determine which method of construction -concrete-based or bitumen-based -- the government should use for roads and highways.

Abul Kalam Azad will lead the committee incorporating two members from the ministries concerned, he said.

The committee will visit several countries, including India and Malaysia to observe their road construction and will give their observations on which

method will be good and cost-effective for Bangladesh, he said.

The committee was asked to give their report within 15 days. However, not the same method

would be used for constructing all the roads and highways, Kamal said. The minister said many roads and highways were damaged due to exces-

sive rain and flood last year. Directives have been given to start repair work of roads across the country

immediately. Replying to a question about starting repair work of the Dhaka-Chittagong highway within one year of its construction, he declined to comment and said

"My work is to approve projects. My people have already visited the highway but I did not get their report yet. I can

the concerned minister could give

say upon receiving it," he added. AL lawmaker Mohibur Rahman Manik said a massive repair work of roads will start across the country ahead of the next parliamentary election and it will add a new dimension to development.

"Directives have been given to do everything not only centring the next election but also for sustainable development," said Manik, also a member of the parliamentary standing committee on planning ministry.

### Khaleda's bail plea

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sentenced her to five years in the Zia Orphanage Trust graft case on Feb 8, was shown arrested in the case last month.

Eight people were killed and 20 others wounded in the arson attack on a bus in Chauddagram during a BNPled alliance's movement on February 3, 2015.

Two cases were filed over the incident -- one for the killings and the other for the use of explosives.

accused in the murder case.

Meanwhile, the Anti-Corruption Commission yesterday submitted to the Supreme Court a concise statement on its appeal against the High Court order that granted bail to the BNP chairperson in the graft case.

minister, when it granted her bail.

The defence lawyers did not submit any medical certificate, although they claimed she was suffering from different diseases, the ACC said in the state-

short sentence -- none of which is a

legal ground for granting bail, the ACC lawyer told The Daily Star, citing the statement.

The Appellate Division of the Supreme Court will hear the appeal against the HC's order of bail granted

to Khaleda on May 8, the ACC lawyer added. Attorney General Mahbubey Alam recently told this correspondent that his office will submit a separate concise statement to the apex court this

HC. two weeks, after the ACC and government submit their summary state-

The HC, on March 12, granted Khaleda Zia four months' bail on four grounds -- a short sentence of five years, health condition, facing trial, and the case records reaching the

### CEC for troops deployment

FROM PAGE 1

"Military deployment is not under the the decision. urisdiction of the Election Commission. Rather, the government will take steps in this regard realising the necessity if the commission wanted army deployment," Quader said while addressing a programme at The Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in the capital.

The armed forces would remain under the Ministry of Defence and the law-enforcement agencies would be under the EC during the national polls, he argued.

Quader, also the road transport and bridges minister, said the EC at best could request the government to deploy army during the polls.

During a dialogue with Election Commission late last year, most of the political parties wanted deployment of military personnel and dissolution of parliament before the next general elections.

At least 25 out of 40 parties that took part in the dialogue demanded deployment of army in the parliamentary polls. Six parties left it to the commission to decide, while three others opposed the idea. The rest did not comment on the issue.

The defence forces had earlier been mentioned as law enforcers in the Representation of the People Order and empowered to arrest anyone on the voting day for any election- related offence. However, the RPO was amended in 2009 and the armed forces are no longer mentioned as the law enforcers.

The much-talked-about issue came at the forefront as the ruling Awami League opposed the idea and its archrival BNP strongly demanded military deployment.

this regard. At yesterday's roundtable, AL law-

maker and party's presidium member Col (retd) Faruk Khan said they want to work unitedly with all political parties, civil society members and other stakeholders to hold a free, fair and inclusive national election.

Faruk said it is true that there are some flaws in the electoral system. "Therefore, we cannot expect a 100 percent flawless election in the coun-

On BNP's demand of deployment of armed forces in the elections, the senior

AL leader said it is the EC that will make Khulna and Gazipur city corporation

political parties will contest the next general election as the present EC is the

vocal to ensure their franchise as the constitution has guaranteed it for every

He reiterated his party's demand for deployment of military personnel in the next national election to ensure free and

fair polls. end, he added.

eleventh hour.

sending the postal ballots in time, he added. Former election commissioner Brig Gen (retd) M Sakhawat Hossain, former ambassadors Shamsher M Chowdhury, Abdul Momen Chowdhury, Nasim Ferdous, among others, spoke at the

The CEC has meanwhile said the commission would bring some changes to the electoral code of conduct to create

2014. If all parties do not take part, the election would not be a fair and competitive one, he observed.

**BNP FOR ARMY IN CITY POLLS** 

strongest and most capable compared to any commission of the past. On the voting rights of Bangladeshi nationals abroad, he said AL is always

programme. EWG Director Dr Md The EC is yet to clear its position in Abdul Alim presented a keynote paper.

present Jatiya Sangsad.

He claimed that people hope that all 15.

BNP standing committee member Nazrul Islam Khan stressed the need for amending the electoral rules and holding dialogues with political parties and other stakeholders to find out the best way to ensure the franchise of the

Bangladeshi expatriates.

On the franchise of overseas voters, the CEC said officials engaged in election duty including law enforcers, prisoners and Bangladeshi expats will be able to cast their votes through postal ballots. They have to apply to their respective returning officers to that

The CEC, however, said the existing law often creates obstacles in this regard as the court sometimes issues ruling centring election candidates at the Change in ballot papers in the last

a level-playing field in case of holding the election without dissolving the In reply to a query, he told reporters on Saturday it would be unfortunate if the next election is held like the way the previous national election took place in

BNP wants army deployment in both

elections scheduled to be held on May

the use of electronic voting machine (EVM) in the polls. "The law-enforcement agencies are working like a government's partisan force. Voters cannot trust in them. In such a situation, army deployment is essential," Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, senior

The party, however, opined against

joint secretary general of the party, told journalists at a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters. Rizvi added, "Although people have no interests in the use of EVMs, the Election Commission has announced that the machine would be used in many polling stations. We think it

reflects the government's intention. "I on behalf of my party demand normal ballot boxes and deployment of

army in the two city corporation polls." The BNP leader alleged that there is no level-playing field in the city elections and "AL criminals" are taking arms

rehearsal in the voting areas. Referring to CEC Nurul Huda's statement that participation of all political parties is essential for holding a fair election, Rizvi said it is the responsibility of the CEC to bring all parties to the polls.

#### Malaysia PM pledges cash, moment creates a major obstacle to jobs as polls inch closer

ance.

Najib Razak Saturday pledged millions of new jobs and more cash for low-income workers, ahead of a tough election battle expected early next month. Najib is fighting to win a third term

Malaysia's scandal-hit Prime Minister

at the head of his ruling Barisan Nasional coalition, which has governed Malaysia since independence in 1957 but has seen support drop in recent years. He faces a revived opposition and is battling a massive financial scandal,

making the hotly-anticipated poll one

of the sternest-ever tests for the alli-

week on the government's appeal Khaleda and 76 other people were against the bail order passed by the

ACC lawyer Advocate Khurshid Alam Khan placed the 28-page concise statement saying that the HC did not consider the gravity of the offence committed by Khaleda, a former prime

The HC granted her bail upon consideration of old age, social status and

Khaleda's lawyers are supposed to submit two separate concise statements to the SC on the same appeals in

ments, he added. Following two separate leave-toappeal petitions filed by the ACC and the government, the SC stayed the HC

bail order on March 19. The apex court also allowed the ACC and the government to move separate appeals before this court and

fixed May 8 for hearing.

## Dozens killed in Syria

rity advisers yesterday said the United States would not rule out launching another missile attack. "I wouldn't take anything off the table," White House Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Adviser Thomas Bossert said in an interview on ABC's

"This Week." "We are looking into the attack at this point," he said, adding that the

photos of the incident are "horrible." In one video shared by activists, the lifeless bodies of around a dozen children, women and men, some of them with foam at the mouth, were seen. "Douma city, April 7 ... there is a strong smell here," a voice can be

heard saying. Reuters could not independently

verify the reports. Douma is in the eastern Ghouta region near Damascus. Assad has won back control of nearly all of eastern Ghouta in a Russian-backed military campaign that began in February,

leaving just Douma in rebel hands. The Ghouta offensive has been one of the deadliest in Syria's seven-yearlong war, killing more than 1,600 civilians, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.

Facing military defeat, rebel groups in other parts of eastern Ghouta have taken safe passage to other opposition-held areas at the Turkish border. Until now, Jaish al-Islam has rejected that option, demanding it be allowed to stay in

a deal had been struck under which Jaish al-Islam would finally leave for the town of Jarablus after saying the group had asked for negotiations. There was no immediate comment

Syrian state media said on Sunday

from Jaish al-Islam, which has been one of the most prominent insurgent groups in the war. A pro-Syrian opposition TV station, Orient, said earlier talks were

under way between Jaish al-Islam and Russia to reach a final settlement for Douma. Taking Douma would seal Assad's biggest victory since 2016, and underline his unassailable position in the

The Syrian Observatory monitor-One of Trump's top homeland secu- ing group said it could not confirm whether chemical weapons had been used in the attack on Saturday. Observatory Director Rami Abdulrahman said 11 people had

died in Douma as a result of suffocation caused by heavy bombardment. Medical relief organisation SAMS said a chlorine bomb hit Douma hospital, killing six people, and a second attack with "mixed agents",

including nerve agents, had hit a nearby building. Basel Termanini, the US-based vice president of SAMS, which operates medical facilities and supports medics in Syria, told Reuters another 35 people had been killed at a nearby

women and children. The joint statement from SAMS and the civil defence said medical centres had taken in more than 500 people suffering breathing difficulties, frothing from the mouth and smelling of chlorine.

apartment building, most of them

One of the victims was dead on arrival and six died later, it said. Civil defence volunteers reported more than 42 cases of people dead at their homes showing the same symptoms, it said. Tawfik Chamaa, a Geneva-based Syrian doctor with the Syria-focused

Union of Medical Care and Relief Organizations (UOSSM), a network of Syrian doctors, said 150 people were confirmed dead and the number was growing. "The majority were civilians, women and children trapped in underground shelters," he told Reuters. Syrian state news agency SANA

exposed and failed attempt to obstruct advances by the Syrian Arab Army," citing an official source. The Syrian government has repeat-

edly denied using chemical weapons

said Jaish al-Islam was making

"chemical attack fabrications in an

during the conflict. "We have received reports of many people killed and injured in Duma in the past 24 hours. We continue to be extremely concerned for people who

remain in Douma who are being subjected to escalating hostilities," war that has killed hundreds of thou-UN Office for the Coordination of sands of people since it mushroomed Humanitarian Affairs spokeswoman from protests against his rule in 2011. Linda Tom said.