



PM to attend BIMSTEC summit on November 30

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is scheduled to visit Thailand to attend the BIMSTEC summit on November 30.

Masud Bin Momen, secretary to the foreign ministry, said this after a meeting with Indian Ministry of External Affairs Secretary (East) Shaurobh Kumar in the capital yesterday.

From December, Bangladesh will be the next chair and India the secretary general of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation.

There will also be a foreign minister-level meeting of the BIMSTEC on July 17, Momen told reporters at the foreign ministry.

He added that he and the Indian external affairs secretary discussed the agenda of the minister-level meeting and the future course of actions for BIMSTEC.

Shaurabh talked about India's perspectives as a focal country for security issues while Momen shared how there might be free trade in the sub-region.

Roads and energy connectivity were also discussed.

"We also want to take the bilateral or trilateral projects to a higher level."

There are Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal Motor Vehicle project, Asian Highway Project, and India, Myanmar, Thailand Highway Project, he said.

"These should be coordinated, not fragmented. The same goes with the grid connectivity."

When asked if they discussed the upcoming national election, Momen said the issue was irrelevant.

"These meetings are pre-scheduled. One is not linked to the other. There can be many meetings simultaneously and each has its issues [to discuss]."

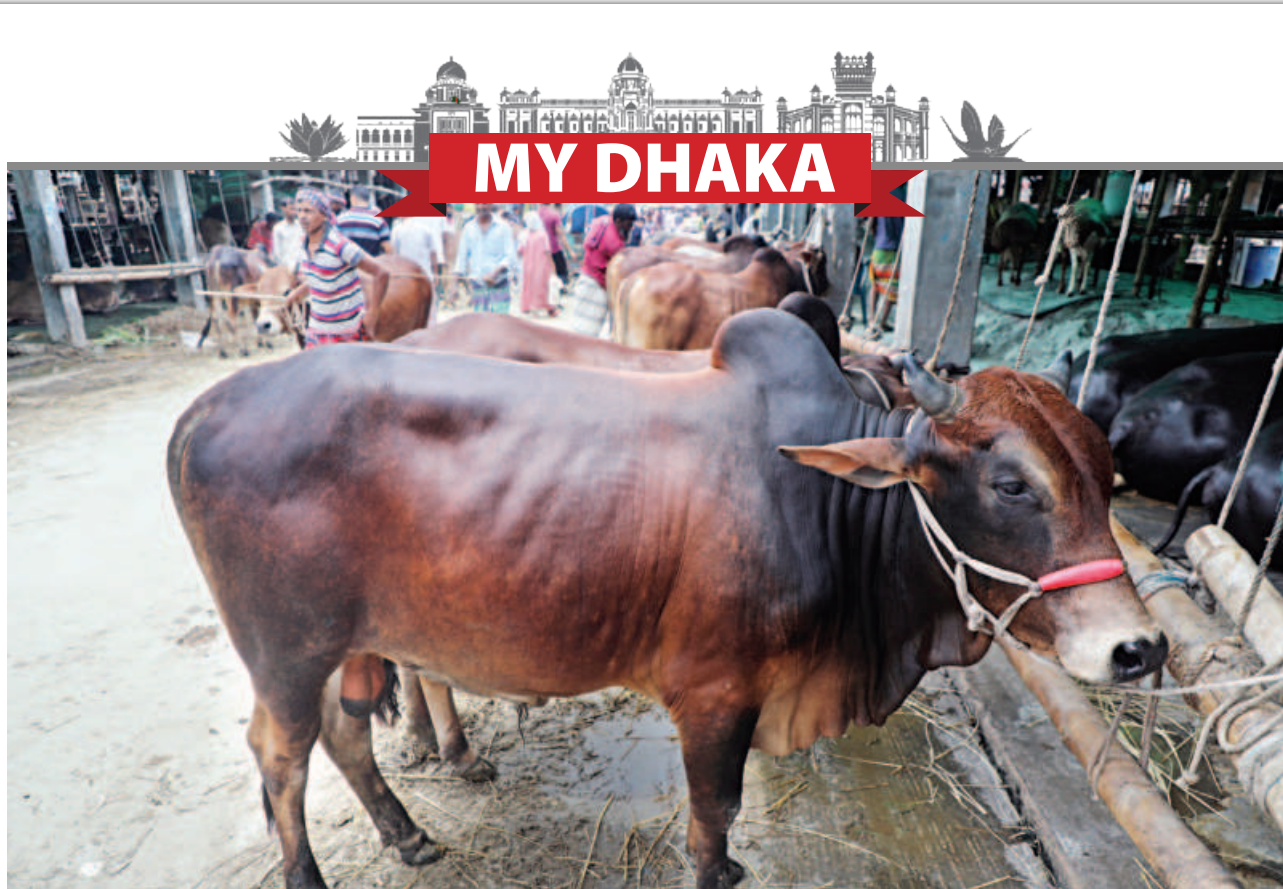


PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Small, marginal farmers and Gabtoli cattle market

SHEIKH HANNAN

The Gabtoli cattle market is situated at Aminbazar. In the past, the area was a suburb of Dhaka but is now considered part of the city as Dhaka has expanded, stretching its boundaries. Gabtoli operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and 365 days a year.

Gabtoli never sleeps! The cattle and livestock market has several permanent sheds that are occupied by traders, known as beparis. These beparis sell their purchased cows to all types of customers, mainly to butchers (koshais), who are now branding themselves as "meat businessman".

The beparis and koshais have a love-hate relationship because they cut into each other's profit. However, some have friendly relations and credit sales by the beparis to the koshais are common affairs. Occasionally, these beparis will sell their cows to nearby well-established cattle-rearing farms.

The traders have their good days and bad. Overall, they survive and are financially sound. A few brokers hang out, most of the time staying inactive and springing to life during Eid-ul-Azha. They make a few quick bucks by creating chaos and confusion between the sellers and customers.

Ahead of the Eid-ul-Azha, Gabtoli constructs many temporary sheds to

accommodate the influx of sellers. They come from all over the country. Among the seller are some new-generation of male and female, small and marginal livestock farmers (prantik khamaris).

These farmers have high hopes and set the initial asking prices similar to the prices set by the well-established cattle farms situated in and around Dhaka city.



As days pass, they are worried, lose hope, start panicking, and in desperation resort to distress sales. Finally, after fervent requests and intense bargaining, they sell their prized possessions at rock-bottom prices. While the farmers are in financial grief, the buyers are happy, and some gleefully decorate the cows with ornaments.

I recollect a young prantik khamari cried profusely and cursed the Dhaka residents because he was unable to sell his cow. He completely broke down



when he realised that he will have to pay rent to Gabtoli for occupying the space even if the cow remains unsold. Another farmer quietly left the city after donating his cow to an orphanage.

The khamari-cows are no less (if not better) than the cows of the well-established cattle farms in terms of breed, colour, size, shape, and weight as evidenced in the recent cattle show held in Agargaon, Dhaka.

We need to help, support, and save the prantik khamaris from distressed sales.

The Department of Livestock through its vast network of field offices provides technical know-how, training, inputs, and medical support to the farmers. The department should take the imitativensness to tackle this distress-sale issue.

These actions will help the farmers receive fair prices for their cows and make Bangladesh self-sufficient in meat production.

Yet another

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The meeting agreed on three issues: a2i cannot participate in commercial activities, form a company and incorporate the presidents of the five trade bodies to the board of directors as its members.

But section 21 of the law allows a2i to form a company.

"The parliamentary process of forming a law was not followed here," said Russell T Ahmed, president of BASIS, the trade body for software and IT-enabled services providers.

The parliamentary standing committee meeting was filmed, he said.

"So if the video or the meeting minutes are made public, one will see that the decision of the meeting has not been reflected in the law. We all came out of the meeting that day [June 18] with happy faces as all of our demands were met."

The bill goes against the interests of the country and the industry.

"This is unacceptable -- we will formally raise the issue and will take it to the prime minister," Ahmed added.

The trade bodies sought the meeting minutes but are yet to get the document, said Wahid Sharif, president of BACCO.

"We are surprised -- we cannot find any logical explanation. We don't know if it was because of a mistake. If it was a mistake, it needs to be corrected," he added.

Contacted, Md Nurul Amin, a lawmaker who is a member of the standing committee, said he could not remember the contents of the meeting.

Fakhrul Imam, a Jatiya Party lawmaker, vehemently opposed the bill in the parliament on Wednesday.

"If the law gets passed, a2i will do consultancy work and contractor's work simultaneously," he said.

In response, Palak said most of the objections raised about the law have been met.

Rahmatullah and Palak could not be reached for comment.

US should first protect rights

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place in schools, shopping malls, and on streets.

"... People are being killed with their families inside homes. They should protect the human rights of their own people first," she added.

Hasina, also the AL president, said thousands of women and men are suffering as refugees due to the war in Ukraine. Mentioning about the shootings in Syria and Palestine, the PM questioned why no one was speaking about those. "Are human rights not being violated there?"

The premier said her government sheltered the persecuted and forcibly displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh. "We took the responsibility of so many people on humanitarian grounds. What can be a bigger

instance of human rights protection than this?"

The AL chief questioned why would her government, which sheltered the people persecuted in another country, violate human rights.

She asked if those who say there are no human rights in Bangladesh saw the repression committed in 2001, the August 21 grenade attack and the incidents that happened from August 15, 1975, to 1996.

Hasina said the government's goal is to protect the voting rights of the people and ensure their economic emancipation. "We have been doing the work and we will continue to do it."

Talking about elections, the PM

said city polls were held recently in Barishal, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Khulna and Gazipur. She said the AL lost in Gazipur and won in four other cities, but no one could raise any question about those elections.

"Did we go there to steal votes? We didn't. Have such peaceful elections ever been held in Bangladesh before?"

Hasina said the AL has secured the voting rights of the people, made them aware of their rights and kept the democratic process uninterrupted in the country.

"They [BNP] were not able to destroy democracy by carrying out arson attacks, murders and other misdeeds from 2009 to 2023," she said.

Polls, labour rights

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may figure prominently in the discussions during the visit.

The issue of the election is considered crucial, especially after the US on May 24 announced a policy that said it won't issue visas to the Bangladeshis found complicit in vote rigging or intimidation in the election process.

Earlier in 2021, the US imposed sanctions on Rab and a few of its senior officials and also did not invite Bangladesh to President Biden's democracy summits in 2021 and 2023.

The US has long been critical of the 2014 and 2018 elections on account of alleged vote rigging.

Suspending GSP facilities for Bangladesh after the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, Washington has also been critical of the labour rights issues, including union rights, living wage and more.

A foreign ministry official said Bangladesh may request Uzra Zeya to withdraw sanctions on Rab and its officials. Earlier this year, the US said Rab made progress in terms of curbing extrajudicial killings, especially since the sanctions were imposed.

A diplomatic source said that while Bangladesh has been making progress under various initiatives since the Rana Plaza, the recent murder of trade union leader Shahidul Islam has complicated things, and so the issue of may come up during the delegation's visit.

On Wednesday, US Ambassador Peter Haas visited the headquarters of the Bangladesh Garment and Industrial Workers Federation and called on the Bangladesh authorities to investigate the murder thoroughly and hold the perpetrators accountable.

Rafiqul Islam, acting director of the foreign ministry's publicity wing, at a regular media briefing yesterday, said European Union Human Rights Affairs' Special Representative Eamon Gilmore will also visit Bangladesh

later this month.

PEACEKEEPERS TO RETURN FROM MALI

Meanwhile, around 1,700 Bangladeshi peacekeepers stationed in Mali will be coming back home by December this year, Rafiqul said.

The decision, taken by the UN Security Council, came after the UN government wanted the UN peacekeepers to be withdrawn from its country.

Since 2013, Bangladeshi peacekeepers -- both from Bangladesh Armed Forces and Bangladesh Police -- have been involved in the mission.

US, EU politicians interfering in Bangladesh: Russia

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of 2018 and 2014, citing alleged vote rigging and irregularities. On May 25, six US Republican congressmen wrote to US President Joe Biden, calling for urgent actions to stop the "human rights abuses" by the Bangladesh government and "give the people of Bangladesh the best possible chance for free and fair parliamentary elections".

On June 13, six representatives of Congress from the Democratic party wrote to the US secretary of state calling for actions to ensure free and fair parliamentary elections in Bangladesh.

On June 12, six Members of European Parliament also asked the EU High Representative Joseph Borrell to contribute to ensuring free, fair, and impartial general elections in Bangladesh, "possibly under a poll-time neutral caretaker government".

The animosity between the US and Russia got worse following Russian invasion of Ukraine, which had a rippling impact across the globe.

The US and EU also imposed sanctions against many Russian entities.

Bangladesh also faces difficulties in paying Russia for the Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant project.

2 killed as train hits motorbike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

At least two people were killed and another injured yesterday when a train hit a motorbike at the Birampur rail crossing area in Santhia upazila of Pabna.

The deceased are identified as Md Jamirul Islam, 32, and Md Babu Munshi, 25, of village Kabarikola in Santhia upazila of Pabna.

The injured Momin Shikdar, 28, of the same village has been admitted to the Pabna general hospital in a critical condition.

Sub-inspector of Ishwardi GRP police station Islam Alimullah, quoting locals, said they were going to Kashinathpur Bazar from their village riding a motorbike. While crossing the Birahimpur rail line around 6.30am, the Dhalarchar Express hit the motorbike leaving the two dead on the spot, the SI added.

The SI said there is no gate at the crossing for the safety of people.

A case was filed with the Ishwardi GRP police station.

ICC prosecutor visits Rohingya camps

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim A A Khan yesterday visited Rohingya camps in Ukhiya, Cox's Bazar and interacted with refugees to know about the alleged crimes committed against them in Myanmar.

A three-member delegation of ICC led by Khan visited Camp 1 and Camp 12, said Mohammad Khalid Hossain, additional commissioner of Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC). What they discussed in the meeting couldn't be known as no journalists were allowed there.

Mohammad Zubair, chairman of ARSPLA, a refugee camp-based organisation working for the rights of Rohingyas, said 15 people from the persecuted community, including him, met the ICC prosecutor in the morning at the Lambasia camp office.

He said the women present there narrated the tortures and abuses they suffered in Myanmar in 2016-17.

On Wednesday, Khan held a meeting with the Refugee, Relief and Repatriation Commissioner Mohammad Mizanur Rahman. Officials present at the meeting said they discussed the total situation of the camps, law and order situation and assistance activities.

The prosecutor also expressed his concerns over the slashing of food assistance to the Rohingyas.

BGB detains 2 Indians for illegal entry

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Lalmonirhat

Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) early yesterday detained two Indian nationals in Lalmonirhat for entering the country without valid documents.

The detainees were identified as Rahmat Ullah, 30, and Suman Haque, 23. They are both from Jaridharla Daribas village under Dinhatata Police Station in West Bengal's Cooch Bihar, said Maj Asifur Islam Siddiquee, acting commanding officer of Lalmonirhat BGB Battalion 15.

They were detained from a house at Kawar Char area on the border of Dighaltari under Aditumari upazila. They will be handed over to India's Border Security Force (BSF) through a flag meeting, he said.