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People's Right to Know

Pakistan opens door for Vajpayee

Relations thaw as MPs visit India next week

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday received a formal invitation from his Pakistani counterpart Zafarullah Jamali to visit Islamabad for talks, television channels reported.

The invitation was handed over to India's senior-most diplomat in Islamabad, T. C. A. Raghavan, they said.

The invitation follows a telephone conversation between Jamali and Vajpayee last Monday, during which the invitation was conveyed verbally by the Pakistani premier. He also offered to travel to India himself.

It comes a day after Vajpayee Friday announced the restoration of full diplomatic and air links with Pakistan, severed almost 17 months ago following an attack on India's parliament in December 2001 by gunmen New Delhi claims were sponsored by Islamabad. Vajpayee on Friday ruled out a trip to Islamabad.

"Prime Minister Jamali invited me, I could not accept it...", he told the upper house of parliament, breaking off mid-sentence and then adding, "But I do not want to speak any more on this."

Vajpayee yesterday called for "careful planning" before any meeting takes place between New Delhi and the Pakistani leadership, a foreign ministry spokesman told reporters. "The prime minister emphasised the need for careful preparation on the ground so that

Last in my life, an emotional Vajpayee says

PTI, New Delhi

Referring to the latest bid for peace with Pakistan, an emotional Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said the initiative will be "last" in his life.

"After two experiences, the third round of talks will be decisive. At least in my lifetime, this will be the last," Vajpayee told Parliament Friday.

"How long shall India and Pakistan will continue to fight?... will this bloodbath going on for 50 years come to an end or not?" he said.

The Prime Minister was responding to a clarification after he had made a statement on his talks with Pakistan's Prime Minister Pervez Musharraf last week.

Govt borrowing eases on low ADP implementation

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government's borrowing from the banking system is quite low this fiscal -- 22 per cent of the July-April target -- because of low implementation of the annual development programme (ADP) and continued selling of savings instruments.

The FY03 budget had targetted Tk 1,358 crore borrowing from the banks to finance budget deficit. After 10 months of the fiscal, the net borrowing by the government from banks stood at Tk 310 crore against 1,603 crore of last fiscal's same period.

While borrowing from banks decreased, the government's financing of its deficit from savings instruments held on to the target. It planned to sell Tk 8,608 crore of savings instruments during FY03. In the first six months, instruments worth Tk 4,618 crore have been sold a little more than the target.

Implementation of the ADP this fiscal has been quite low only 30 per cent executed during the first six months against the average of about 35 per cent.

Low availability of foreign aid and lack of implementation capacity have been identified as the main reasons for the low performance rate. Even many self-financed projects have suffered because of lack of implementation capacity. The ADP has already been downsized from Tk 19,200 crore to Tk 17,100 crore. The actual figure may even be lower, planning ministry sources said.

Such implementation problem led to the low demand for fund from banks, which also put the pressure off inflation. The brisk financing from savings instrument also helped keep inflation low.

The other strategy the government pursued is to pay back loans to the Bangladesh Bank (BB) by taking Tk 3,792 crore loans from commercial banks. Till the last week of April, the government retired Tk 3482 crore loans to the BB. This also helped deflate inflation.

Morshed hails Indo-Pak dialogue initiatives

UNB, Dhaka

Foreign Minister M Morshed Khan yesterday said current initiatives for dialogue between India and Pakistan without third party mediation came as an encouraging development for South Asia and is a sign of maturity of South Asian leadership.

Talking to reporters at his office, he termed Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's remarks in Kashmir "constructive" while Pakistan's reaction to that "matured and logical."

Khan said telephonic conversation between the prime ministers of India and Pakistan to resolve the conflict between the two nuclear neighbours would open up a "new chapter" in the region.

"The maturity and realisation shown by the leadership of the two



Yellow marking on the photo shows a demarcated area under threat of imminent encroachment by an influential group.

Fresh onslaught on Gulshan Lake

SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Some influential people have demarcated a large chunk of the Gulshan-Banani-Baridhara Lake at Road-35, Gulshan. They put up a signboard and claimed the ownership of the land.

The signboard was however removed by the Rajuk officials yesterday morning after the complaints had been lodged. "The land belongs to Safea Chowdhury and Rafea Rahman," read the signboard. Each of them owns a 10-katha plot. They have erected boundaries with bamboo poles.

Local residents said in last few years several people put up similar signboards on the same stretch of the lake.

Local people alleged that when the occupiers started measuring the 'plots' they asked them who they were. They replied that this time nobody could prevent them because they have very close relationship with the Prime Minister.

"When we came to know that these people are very powerful, we did not dare to intervene any more," said a resident, on the Road 35, requesting anonymity.

The lake area was sold out under the loophole of a law, which is now defunct. The law said that if the government did not develop an area within a stipulated time after acquiring it, the original owner could claim it back.

The entire lake area of Baridhara-Banani-Gulshan has been shown as "under development" and claimed back through the office of the Deputy Commissioner (DC).

A section of Rajuk officials have been guiding the occupiers with valuable information. "The only thing that has so far prevented these people from filling up the lake is the vigilance of the residents and the media," said another resident.

Over the years, acres of lake were filled up by Rajuk, and some corrupt officials managed to allocate the plots secretly to the influential individuals, where now rows of houses have been built.

Rajuk Chairman Iqbaluddin Choudhury told The Daily Star the moment he had heard about the encroachment, he ordered his men to remove the signboard and all other obstacles immediately.

"The Wetland Protection Law clearly gives us the authority to act to protect the wetland," said Choudhury.

SARS prevention Passengers must fill in health card at ZIA

UNB, Dhaka

As SARS patients have been detected in neighboring India, filling out health cards at the Zia International Airport (ZIA) has been made mandatory for incoming passengers, Health Minister Dr Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain told an inter-ministerial meeting here yesterday.

"Passengers will also need to specify where they will stay for the 10 days following their arrival," he added.

The government, in the wake of SARS cases in India, has taken all-out measures to prevent the virus that can only come through visitors.

The health minister, who presided over the inter-ministerial

Charges pressed against 22 in Bagerhat killing, rape case

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Twenty-two people, including two Jubo Dal leaders have been charged with killing Tapan Bhattachariya and raping three women of Thakurbari at Komorpur village in Bagerhat Sadar upazila.

Of the accused, nine are now in jail hajat while the rest 13 still at large.

The absconders are Jubo Dal leaders Haroon Shaikh and Moazzem Hossain, Sharif Malong, Nimal, Sanjoy, Anwar, Bulbul, Azad, Alam, Imam, Sentu, Faruque and Shahjahan.

FIR-named accused Delwar Hossain, Kabir and former UP member Abdur Rahman have been dropped from the chargesheet.

It has been stated that accused swooped on the Thakurbari at Komorpur on the night of March 9 this year.

They murdered Tapan Bhattachariya and raped three women, including his wife in the house.

On March 10, Niranjana

Brace computer tech to fight poverty

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Speakers at a dialogue yesterday called for harnessing information communication technology (ICT) as means for cutting poverty.

The lack of basic ICT infrastructures, including telecommunication and able manpower, is presenting a drag on the growth and excellence of the sector, they observed.

The dialogue was held under the regional consultation meeting on National Policy Review Forum 2003.

Prof Nowsher Ali, director of Bangladesh Institute of Technology (BIT), Khulna, attended the dialogue as the chief guest with Dr Rafiqul Islam, head of the Department of Computer Science and Engineering of the institute in the chair.

Prof Ali called on the civil society to play a proactive role to take the nation's ICT quest ahead.

He said, "We need to develop technology keeping in mind our own tradition which can reach and benefit the grassroots people."

"We need to develop applied technology for a knowledge-based society."

Dr Ananya Raihan, a research fellow of CPD, said Bangladesh's ICT policy lacked vision for human resources development.

"The ICT policy does not consider poverty alleviation issues, it is

Corruption eats away education quality

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Corruption and campus violence are two main impediments to raising the standard of education and a proactive civil society role is a must to achieve consensus on different education-related issues.

For maintaining a congenial academic atmosphere, there must be a 10-year moratorium on politics by teachers, students and employees at educational institutions, higher salary for teachers, increased teacher-student contact hours and more teachers.

The University Act of 1973 has to be amended and availability of standard learning materials ensured.

This was the unanimous view of participants at a dialogue on "Education Policy", in the city yesterday.

Organised by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo, the dialogue was part of the Regional Consultation Meeting on National Policy Review Forum-2003.

Vice-chancellor of Khulna University Prof. Abdul Kader Bhuiyan was the chief guest while Principal of Government B L College, Khulna, Moazzem Hossain chaired the dialogue held at the Millennium Inn.

Prof. Bhuiyan said in the past education was never separated from politics, but then there was a positive political motivation. But now, an unhealthy political influence is vitiating the academic atmosphere.

Dhaka University came into being after Calcutta University on the basis of a political motivation, which was a positive one. But that could not be materialised, he noted.

Empower women for national uplift

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Speakers called for empowering women and involving them in national development at a dialogue in Khulna yesterday.

Women should also be allowed to exercise their rights as elected people's representatives, they said.

In their speeches to the dialogue on 'Women Empowerment and National Development', they called for stern action to stem the tide of violence against and sexual harassment of women.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue organised the event in collaboration with The Daily Star and the Prothom Alo at the Western Inn. Chaired by ADA chairperson

Interns at Barisal medical college hospital on strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Barisal

Interns at the Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital (SBMCH) began an indefinite strike yesterday demanding their arrears of three months' salary and ransacked the office of the hospital director during a procession on the college campus, hospital sources said.

The demonstrators entered the office at around noon, smashing windows and damaging furniture until police intervened and quelled the situation half an hour later.

Interns' leader Dr Abir Ahmed said 280 interns did not get paid for the last three months as the payroll list, supposed to be sent to the health ministry every month, has been held back, and accused former hospital director Abdul Halim Bhuiyan for the matter.

Meanwhile, patients at the SBMCH, who heavily depend on interns' services, mostly went unattended as a negotiation between strikers and hospital authorities failed to break the deadlock yesterday.

Cabinet decisions die down in execution

REZAUL KARIM

propose changes.

Ministry of Information, Disaster Management and Relief, CHT Affairs, Primary and Mass Education and Planning Division are yet to put forward a single proposal or summary for cabinet's approval.

Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs so far placed 28 proposals, Cabinet Division 26, Finance Division 14, home ministry 12, commerce ministry 11 and 10 each by the Local Government Division and education ministry.

Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Religious Affairs, Defence, Youth and Sports, Labour and Manpower, Social Welfare, Establishment, Cultural Affairs and Economic Relations Division and Election Commission put forward two proposals each in the cabinet meeting.

Ministries of Housing and Public Works, Post and Telecommunication, Water Resources, Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Textile and Civil Aviation and Tourism hardly bothered the cabinet placing only one summary each for consideration.

The cabinet also reviewed its 24 decisions that were waiting for implementation since 1983. On re-examination, it cancelled 20 decisions and accepted the rest with necessary amendments.

The dismal decision implementation rate prompted the cabinet to issue a note of warning for speeding up the progress with utmost priority. Cabinet has also asked the ministers

Bombs hurled at DU teacher's residence

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Four bombs were hurled at the residence of a Dhaka University teacher last night.

Shafiqur Rahman of the law department phoned The Daily Star office at 8:38pm and said four powerful bombs were thrown onto his residence 10 minutes ago.

"The bombs went off one after another rocking my whole residence. But I don't know who threw them," he said.

He said he has informed the Ramna police to escort him out of his residence at the Shahidullah Hall house tutors' quarter as he feels unsafe.

Shafiqur was sent on forced leave following his alleged disgraceful comment about Prime Minister Khaleda Zia in classroom recently. He however denied having made any such comment.

He alleged that the university authorities had not taken any step to ensure his security "although they were informed about such possible attacks".