

Rise above political divide to promote economy

Vajpayee urges at Saarc information ministers' meet

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee called upon South Asian countries to promote economic cooperation despite political differences at the third conference of Saarc information ministers that began in New Delhi yesterday.

Vajpayee voiced unhappiness that Saarc (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) "has been struggling to emerge from the concept to the reality of close regional cooperation" and cautioned that if the seven-nation economic group cannot organise itself, "it will simply miss the boat".

Bangladesh Information Minister Tariqul Islam and his counterparts from

Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are also attending the conference of the grouping that began its journey in 1985.

Vajpayee recalled the recent Indo-Asean summit in Indonesia where he signed an accord for comprehensive economic cooperation with the region and discussed key initiatives for BIMSTEC. He also pointed to India-

European Union summit to be held in Delhi later this month and his current visit to Moscow to talk transport corridor linking India, Iran and Central Asia with Russia.

He said he mentioned all the events to drive home the point that these experiences in regional and sub-regional cooperation "hold a lesson for Saarc".

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Pakistan invites Vajpayee to Saarc summit

REUTERS, IANS, New Delhi

Pakistan yesterday invited India's prime minister to a regional summit in Islamabad as the nuclear neighbours struggle to revive a stalled peace process.

Information Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed -- one of the first just two Pakistani cabinet ministers allowed into India in more than two years -- this week shook hands with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at a regional information ministers conference.

"It was a short, sweet, smart message I have given him -- we are awaiting his...summit visit," Ahmed told reporters later. "The people of Pakistan have a lot of expectations."

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Lankan president, PM agree to meet

REUTERS, Colombo

Sri Lanka's prime minister has accepted an invitation to meet the president today, but neither appears ready for compromise in a power struggle that threatens efforts to restart peace talks with Tamil rebels.

Cabinet spokesman G.L. Peiris said Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe will hold talks with President Chandrika Kumaratunga, who sacked three cabinet ministers and suspended parliament last week because she felt the prime minister was making too many concessions to the rebels.

Wickremesinghe was in Washington at the time.

But Peiris indicated that Wickremesinghe was unlikely to support the president's call for a national unity government.

"The prime minister believes his main task is the fragility of this (peace) process and practical ways of mitigating that damage," Peiris told a news conference yesterday.

"That is the main matter he would like to discuss with her excellency, the president," he said.

"The prime minister would like to

emphasize that he enjoys the support of 130 members of parliament and there is no need whatsoever in regard to change," he said of the 225-seat legislature.

News of the meeting came as two envoys from peace broker Norway arrived for discussions aimed at getting the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) back to the negotiating table.

Their visit has been overshadowed by the political turmoil.

Wednesday's meeting will be the first between the president and

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DU students vandalise cab as it drags rickshaw-puller

DU CORRESPONDENT

Students of Dhaka University yesterday vandalised a taxicab after it knocked down a rickshaw-puller and dragged him for about one kilometre.

The car dragged Jahurul Haque Hall after it hit his rickshaw in front of the Central Shaheed Minar at around 11:00am. It also dragged the rickshaw entangled with its bumper.

Students of the hall stopped the cab at the hall gate and rescued

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Move to ease traffic jam sees little result

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A major government step to ease traffic jam on the city roads has apparently failed to reduce man-hours lost in traffic tailback.

Government-deployed strike forces comprising members of police, Bangladesh Rifles, Ansar, Armed Police Battalion, deployed to ease traffic jam at the beginning of the Ramadan, has proved futile in controlling the large number of vehicles plying the roads

every day, especially immediately before Iftar, at the beginning of office hours and during its break.

"Dhaka is not a city for so many vehicles, it is quite impossible for law enforcers to control the large number of vehicles running on so few number of roads," said a BDR personnel at Farmgate, preferring not to be named.

"Double-deckers, local and long-route minibuses, microbuses, semi-trucks, private cars, three-wheelers and

in many cases, rickshaws -- all in droves ply the same road and many of their drivers have no traffic sense. How is it possible to make the road a jam-free one?" another BDR personnel said.

Members of the strike forces were found clearing the roads off the vehicles as soon as any passenger bus stopped at the stoppages, but the rush of other vehicles is so massive that their action yields very little result.

"As soon as we stop traffic on any

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PHOTO: STAR

Passengers travelling to northern districts two weeks to the Eid queue at ticket counters of long-haul bus service at Gabtali in Dhaka to book in advance after bus companies released tickets yesterday.

20 al-Qaeda suspects held in Iraq, US troops kill Sadr City mayor

AP, AFP, Baghdad

The top US commander in Iraq said yesterday the military had detained about 20 people suspected of links to al-Qaeda.

And the American troops have shot and killed US-backed mayor of the Shiite-populated Baghdad district of Sadr City in an altercation with them.

In Baghdad, the coalition military commander, Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, told reporters that the US

military had arrested about 20 people who may have been linked to al-Qaeda but none had been confirmed as part of Osama bin Laden's terror network.

"At one point, we had up to about 20 suspected al-Qaeda members, but as we have continued to refine and interrogate, we have not been able to establish definitively that they were al-Qaeda members," Sanchez said.

Sanchez did not say where they were held, when they were detained or whether any of them have been

released. US officials have said they suspect foreign volunteers, including some from al-Qaeda, have slipped across the borders into Iraq to take part in a "holy war" against the US-led occupation.

However, a number of US commanders have said they were uncertain about the numbers of foreign fighters and their role in the insurgency.

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26 House Democrats push for firing Rumsfeld

REUTERS, Washington

A group of more than two dozen House of Representatives Democrats on Monday said they had introduced a resolution urging President Bush to fire Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld.

"This resolution would make official what so many members of Congress already believe -- that the soldiers in Iraq and America's foreign policy would be helped greatly if Donald Rumsfeld would leave," Rep. Charles Rangel of New York said in a statement.

Rangel said he so far had 25 cosponsors to the resolution who were "willing to stand up and say what so many policy makers know, that the first step to bringing our troops home is to send Donald Rumsfeld home."

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Traders make quick bucks over LPG crisis

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Production of the LPG has gone down to half due to the abrupt fall in supply of liquid natural gas from the Kailashtila Gas field for a few weeks.

The shortage of liquid gas has left the LP Gas Limited in a difficult position to meet the demand for cylinderised gas of the three state-run companies -- Padma, Meghna and Jamuna of the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation (BPC) as well as of some private concerns and dealers.

The production of liquid gas fell drastically in recent weeks for low pressure of gas at the wells of the Kailashtila Gas Field, an official at the Sylhet Gas Fields Company Limited (SGFL) said.

Some unscrupulous traders are cashing in on the crisis, raising price by nearly Tk 100 a cylinder. Consumers are forced to buy an LPG cylinder at Tk 420 to Tk 440 instead of Tk 350 in Sylhet.

The supply of the LPG to dealers of the greater Sylhet region had been reduced to one-third causing discontent among them, an official

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Cop, two others hurt as criminals clash at Mirpur

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A traffic sergeant, a housewife and a young boy received bullet injuries being caught in the crossfire during a gunfight between the extortionist groups of Kala Jahangir and the Taj Group at city's Mirpur-10 roundabout yesterday.

Housewife Sheuli Begum, 18, was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hospital after receiving a bullet in the chest while Sergeant Rezaul Bashar, 30, now undergoing treatment at Orthopaedic Hospital was hit in the leg. Details about the condition of the young boy Mamun, 13, also at Orthopaedic Hospital, could not be known.

"Some youths appeared at the crossing in a CNG-run auto-rickshaw at around 10:15am and suddenly opened fire at someone standing on the north-east corner of the roundabout," said the owner of a local tea stall.

"As we pulled our shutters down and passersby ran for cover, a traffic ser-

geant appeared at the spot in his motorbike to assess the situation," he said. "All of a sudden, he fell on the ground after being hit in the leg."

"After trading around 15 gunshots, the gunmen inside the auto-rickshaw sped away towards Pallabi," said a rickshawpuller.

Gunmen on the other side also scattered and melted away, he said. Traffic policemen stationed at the crossing sent Sergeant Bashar to Orthopaedic Hospital.

Thirteen-year-old Mamun found lying beside the road was also rushed to Orthopaedic Hospital.

Sheuli was shot a little later as the two sides regrouped and engaged in chase and counter chase at Mirpur Section-6. She was buying vegetables from a roadside vendor when the incident happened in front of her house at Road 2 in Block-A at

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Contract of BoI chief extended

UNB, Dhaka

The contract of Mahmudur Rahman as executive chairman of the Board of Investment (BoI) has been extended by another two years.

The extension will come into effect from November 19, said an official release.

Sehri, Iftar timings			
Ramadan	Nov	Sehri	Iftar
16	12		5-17
17	13	4-50	5-17

Prayer Timings		
November 12		
	Azan	Jamaat
Fajr	4-50	4-55
Zohr	12-45	1-15
Asr	4-00	4-15
Maghrib	5-17	5-23
Esha	7-30	8-00

Source: Islamic Foundation