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Peace gets a boost as Vajpayee ready to meet Pak PM

Truce takes hold in Kashmir

AFP, New Delhi

In a further boost for South Asian peace hopes, India's prime minister said he hoped to meet his Pakistani counterpart in January as a ceasefire between the rival nations' armies in Kashmir continued to hold for a third day yesterday.

Despite the truce, however, violence again struck Indian Kashmir, with police saying two Islamic militants were gunned down in southern Poonch district yesterday as they tried to cross from the

Pakistani zone of Kashmir.

On the outskirts of Srinagar, meanwhile, suspected Muslim militants overnight shot dead a former colleague and injured six security force personnel in an ambush, a police spokesman said.

The killings brought the death toll over the last 24 hours to nine, including six rebels killed on Thursday, underscoring the fragility of the peace process, which New Delhi says is dependent on the end to the insurgency.

The two sides declared a surprise

ceasefire in Kashmir on Tuesday, which officials said has been unbroken.

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who extended a "hand of friendship" to Pakistan on April 18, said he is keen to meet his Pakistani counterpart Zafarullah Jamali on the sidelines of a South Asian summit in Islamabad in January.

"My programme of going to Pakistan is being prepared and I will meet everyone there ... I will be

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Eid-ul-Fitr celebrated

AGENCIES, Dhaka

Eid-ul-Fitr, the greatest religious festival of Muslims, was celebrated across the country on Wednesday.

Government and private offices will reopen today after four days of Eid holiday and weekend.

Devotees offered prayers at Eid congregations in the capital and elsewhere in the country, seeking divine blessings for world peace and welfare of the nation.

In Dhaka, the main Eid congregation was held at National Eidgah on the High Court premises at 8:00am.

Five Eid congregations were held at Baitul Mukarram National Mosque at 7:30am, 8:30am, 9:30am, 10:30am and 11:15am.

President Iajuddin Ahmed offered Eid prayers at National Eidgah Maidan. Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad, chief justice, mayor of Dhaka City Corporation, ministers, judges of the Supreme Court and people from all walks of life joined

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President Iajuddin Ahmed and his wife Dr Anwara Begum greet Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, left, with a bouquet at Bangabhaban and two children, right, embrace in celebration of the Eid-ul-Fitr in front of the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque on Wednesday.



PHOTO: PIDSTAR

Bush's stealth visit to Iraq to boost troops' morale

AFP, Washington

US President George W Bush was back in the United States early yesterday after braving the threat of missiles over Baghdad to join 600 troops for an emotional Thanksgiving dinner in Iraq, in a trip arranged under strict secrecy.

The US president landed in Waco, Texas, at around 1000 GMT. His arrival followed a lightning visit to Iraq aimed to boost troops' dwindling morale on a key US holiday. News of Thursday's visit was not even released until Air Force One had already left, for fear of the sort of missile fire that forced an emergency landing by a DHL civilian cargo jet last week.

Troops of the 1st Armoured

Division which patrols the area around the Iraqi capital leapt to their feet, threw their arms in the air and cheered when the surprise guest arrived at their US holiday feast on Thursday.

"I was looking for a warm meal somewhere, thanks for inviting me to dinner," said the US commander in chief, wearing a blue shirt and a grey army bomber jacket and with his eyes moist, to deafening applause from the troops.

"I can't think of a finer group of folks to be having Thanksgiving dinner with," Bush, with brightly coloured military standards behind him, told the soldiers from the 1st Armoured and 82nd Airborne divisions and the 2nd Armoured Cavalry Regiment in a huge hangar-like

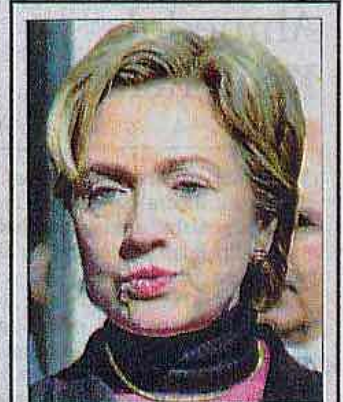
mess hall at Baghdad airport.

"I bring a message on behalf of America, we thank you for your service," he told the troops, who have come under regular attack during the persistent insurgency that has dogged the US-led occupation for the past seven months.

The US president went to Iraq, delivering a defiant message to insurgents who have peppered the coalition military with guerilla attacks, causing more deaths in action since he declared major combat over on May 1, than in the preceding six-week invasion.

"We didn't charge hundreds of miles into the heart of Iraq, and pay a bitter cost of casualties, defeat a ruthless dictator and liberate 25

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Hillary flies in Baghdad hot on heels of Bush

AFP, Baghdad

Former US first lady Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton arrived in Baghdad Friday hot on the heels of a lightning stealth visit by US President George W. Bush for a Thanksgiving dinner with US troops, officials said.

Clinton was due to spend just one day in the insurgency-ridden Iraqi capital after her visit to Afghanistan Thursday in which she spent Thanksgiving with troops there, said a coalition interior ministry official, Thomas Basile.

Before lunch, she met with senior officials of the Coalition Provisional Authority including US overseer Paul Bremer, said Clinton's spokeswoman.

"She then had lunch with troops from her home state (New York) in the dining hall at the palace," she said, referring to the city centre mansion of Saddam Hussein which is now the seat of the occupation administration.

"She was walking through the hall and people were coming up to her. It was a half-hour lunch," the spokeswoman said.

Unlike the US president, who never even left the main military camp at Baghdad airport during his two-and-a-half hour stop-over, Clinton then left the heavily fortified complex around the palace to visit

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Rat sergeant, cop suspended for losing arms

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A sub-inspector of Dhanmondi Police Station and a sergeant of Rapid Action Team (Rat) were suspended for having lost their arms due to negligence at Azimpur and Nakhla para on the Eid day.

Sub-inspector Rezaul Karim went to the house of his sister-in-law at Azimpur Staff Quarters at 10.00am but left his bag containing his uniform, revolver and Tk 5,500 with his motorcycle.

He came out to find that his bag was lost. The revolver could not be recovered till yesterday evening.

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Frenzy of political actions on cards

REAZ AHMAD and SHAKHAWAT LITON

A rejuvenated opposition camp comes up with an array of anti-government programmes, adding spark to post-Eid politics.

This winter would witness a raft of programmes, including hartals to dialogues, in what political pundits pegged as a prelude to a greater anti-government movement, sometime after the Eid-ul-Azha.

The frenzy of political manoeuvring opens today when former president Badruddoza Chowdhury returns home to chalk out his action on the formation of a civil society platform before the left-leaning parties enforce a nationwide hartal on December 13 and the Awami League (AL) holds a political convention in early January.

The hartal, triggered by what the left parties term as bad governance and an onslaught on the poor, may

eventually bet backing from the main opposition AL, sources hinted.

On December 19, representatives of the Union Parishads from across the country would join leaders of the AL, JSD (Inu), Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB) and Workers Party (WP) in Dhaka to finalise schedule for the January convention aimed at exposing government's 'misrule' to people.

Leader of the Opposition Sheikh

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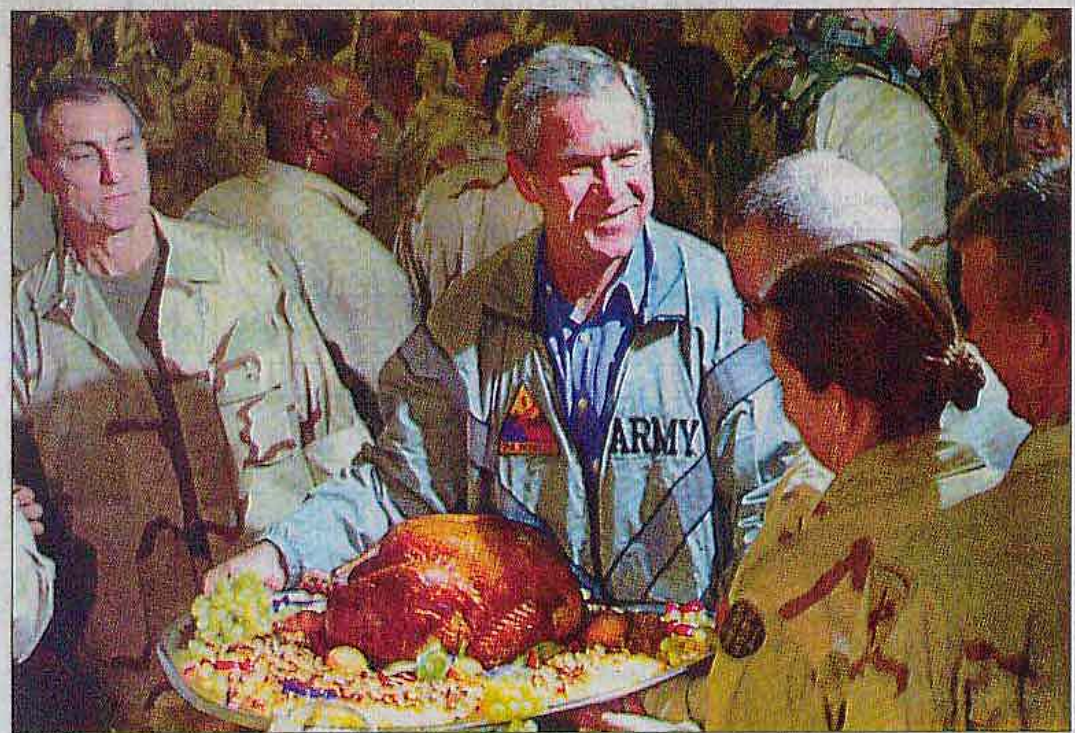


PHOTO: AFP

US President George W Bush holds a Thanksgiving turkey for US troops stationed at Baghdad International Airport after he flew to Iraq under unprecedented secrecy Thursday from Waco in Texas. His trip to Iraq is pegged as a morale-boosting enterprise for the American troops.

Five murdered in city during Eid holidays

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least five people were murdered in the city in separate incidents during the Eid holidays.

In Demra, a young man, Tofazzal Hossain, was beaten to death for his alleged snatching of valuables from pedestrians on the eastside of Gopibagh railway lines in Demra Wednesday night.

However, Hosne Ara, elder sister of Tofazzal said she gave him Tk 300 and asked him to buy a shirt for himself. He was on his way to Gulistan to buy a shirt when a gang of muggers took away his money

and beat him to death.

Police said Tofazzal was caught and beaten while he was mugging from the pedestrians. Assistant Sub-Inspector Sayed Ali removed him to the DMCH where the attending doctors declared him dead. A case was filed with Demra Police Station.

Shyampur police recovered the body of a woman, 22, from a sewage outfall at Pagla Tuesday. Police believe that the victim was murdered and dumped into the lagoon sometime on Monday night. Police sent it to Mitford hospital for autopsy.

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Circular angers UP leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A government restriction on participation of union parishad (UP) chairmen and members in various programmes at home and abroad has sparked off resentment among the elected leaders of the lowest tier of local government.

The local government, rural development and cooperatives (LGRD) ministry imposed the restriction in a circular issued on October 1. It said the local body leaders should take 'permission' from deputy commissioners through upazila nirbahi officers (UNOs) to attend training programmes, seminars and workshops.

In case of foreign visits like study tour, they should take permission from the local government division

of the LGRD and cooperatives ministry, the circular added.

Chairmen and members of the UPs across the country are planning to protest the circular as they believe the government through it wants to fully control the UPs.

"It is an intervention from the central government in the local government bodies. The circular has snatched our freedom as people's representatives. So we are preparing to protest it," Matiur Rahman Tapan, chairman of Sardah Union Parishad at Rajshahi, told The Daily Star yesterday.

The UP chairmen and members will sit on December 19 in Dhaka to lay out a programme for movement against the restriction. They plan to hold a grand convention in the capital in January next year to realise

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