

Promote peace, end hostility in South Asia: Vajpayee

PTI, New Delhi

Calling for promotion of peace and banishing of hostility in South Asia, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee yesterday cited the increased people-to-people contact as a reflection of "intense desire for amity and goodwill."

Inaugurating a two-day conference on "Peace Dividend--Progress for India and South Asia" in New Delhi, he said the demands of globalisation and aspirations of people provided the objective basis for energetic pursuit of a "harmoniously integrated South Asia. People, businesses and organisations are waiting to interact more closely with each other."

They had waited for over half-a-century for fulfilment of "unexploited potential in their own neighbourhood" and were now impatient to move ahead, Vajpayee told a distinguished audience that included former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Union ministers, envoys of several countries and others.

The Prime Minister said, "We can sense this impatience in the outpouring of popular sentiment after our initiatives. The increased travel between India and Pakistan of parliamentarians, businessmen, artists and sportsmen show the intense desire for amity and good-

will. We have to respond to this desire by seeking every possible way to banish hostility and promote peace."

The conference is organised by the Hindustan Times whose Vice-Chairperson and Editorial Director Shobhana Bhartiya said that it was an effort to create greater understanding and to resolve conflicts in the South Asian region.

South Asia mattered because whatever happened in the region had consequences for the entire world, Bhartiya pointed out.

The Prime Minister noted that the conference was taking place ahead of the Saarc Summit in Islamabad and said it could discuss ideas on economic, strategic and geopolitical future of India and South Asia.

As the seven members of Saarc develop greater economic stakes in each other, he said, "We can put aside mistrust and dispel unwarranted suspicions. We will also develop mutual sensitivity to each others' concerns and promote more of our common interests."

Vajpayee said if the Saarc countries--India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and the Maldives--provide legitimate avenues of free commercial interaction, they could eradicate black market and underground trade.

PM returns today

BSS, Dhaka

Prime minister Khaleda Zia returns home today after attending the three-day World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) in Geneva.

She left for Geneva on December 9 to lead the Bangladesh delegation to the summit that began in the Swiss city on December 10.

Khaleda addressed the summit on the second day and made a proposal for creating a 'digital solidarity fund' to promote Information Communication Technology (ICT) globally.

The prime minister had bilateral meetings with a number of world leaders, including Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, on the sidelines of the summit.

Series of blasts pepper US HQs in Iraq

AFP, Baghdad

A series of explosions peppered the US headquarters in the Iraqi capital yesterday after a US soldier died in a suicide truck bombing as mass resignations almost halved the first battalion of the new Iraqi army.

Repeated assurances from US top brass sit uneasily with the daily grind of blood and violence in Iraq where three suicide bombers have blown themselves up in as many days nearby American bases.

Four explosions followed by two very loud blasts had rung out in succession about half past midnight (2130 GMT) in Baghdad followed by another big boom last morning.

"Two projectiles impacted in the vicinity of the Green Zone," a military spokesman said reporting no casualties.

"One caused minor damage to a building," he said. "An investigation is continuing."

Smoke could be seen rising into the clear blue morning sky near the Coalition Provisional Authority headquarters in the city centre after the latest explosion.

Iraqi police on the edge of the zone told reporters it was probably a controlled explosion of ordinance. The US military had no immediate information about the blast.

One US soldier died and 14 others were wounded Thursday in a truck bombing outside the rebel town of Ramadi, 100km west of Baghdad.

"A furniture truck was driven by a suicide bomber" at approximately 1:30 pm (1030 GMT) at Champion Main, 82nd Airborne Division Headquarters, in the vicinity of Ramadi," a statement said.

"It is believed three Iraqis driving the vehicle were killed in the explosion," another statement said.

A suicide car bomber wounded 58 soldiers near the northern city of Mosul and another would-be killer blew himself up just short of a base north of Baghdad on Tuesday.

Troops from the 1st Armoured Division found the body of a colleague who drowned Wednesday night during a routine patrol of the Tigris River in Baghdad, the coalition said.

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The demonstrators also demanded arrest and trial of writer Humayun Azad for his novel, Pak Sar Jamin Saad Baid, published in a Bangla daily's Eid issue and the president of National Press Club for what they said was derogatory to Islam.

They also demanded apology in three days from writer-journalist ABM Hemayet Uddin, joint secretary general of Islamic Shashantantra Andolon, accused the four-party alliance of taking an anti-Islamic stance after coming to power banking on Islam and said: "What the government can do to stay in power is pass a law to declare Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim."

Abdul Latif Nizami, another Nabuwat Andolon leader, took a swipe at the state minister for saying "the agitators would want to capture a mosque and then a church, once the government declare the Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim."

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The 11-party left grouping brings out a procession in Dhaka yesterday in support of its countrywide dawn-to-dusk hartal called for today.

Anti-Ahmadiyya

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cultural group, organised the demonstration, joined by a raft of Islamist outfits, after Juma prayers yesterday, with its President Shamsul Haq in the chair.

"The Ahmadiyyas are not Muslims although they offer prayers and observe fast, as they do not go by basic Islamic rules, including recognising Mohammed as the last prophet," Mamtazi alleged.

"Either you repent for you attitude and swear by Islamic rules and beliefs or be identified as a different commune, not Muslim," said Shamsul Haq.

The demonstrators asked the government to declare Ahmadiyyas non-Muslim and identify their mosques as merely 'places of worship' if they do not comply with Islamic Sharia (Islamic code of religious law).

"We are strong enough to make the government understand what it means to ignore our just demand," Asadullah said, calling for jihad.

Pointing to State Minister for Religious Affairs Mosharef Hossain Shajahan's comments on the issue published in The Daily Star that he could not declare anyone non-Muslim, the convenor of Nabuwat Andolon, Abdul Haman Al Hadi, said Muslims have the power to declare someone murtad (non-believer) and sentence him to death.

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Sadeq Khan for his article, published in the Inqilab, which they said was targeted against the anti-Ahmadiyya group.

Reiterating the demands for trial and punishment for injuring agitating anti-Ahmadiyyas in Nakhla para on November 21 and withdrawal of two 'false cases' filed against them with Tejgaon Police Station, the leaders also called for banning Dewanbagh Peer's activities.

Nabuwat Andolon activists will hold similar demonstrations at Tongi on December 19, Paltan on December 23, Jatrabari on December 26 and Mirpur on January 2.

Hundreds of anti-Ahmadiyyas brought out a procession from the Baitul Mokarram Mosque.

Abdul Ahad Noor of Islami Oikya Parishad, Golem Mostafa Bhuiyan of Swadeshi Jatayatbadi Kendra, Ainur Islam of Bishwa Muslim Parishad, Abdus Samad Jehadi of Islami Oikya Andolon, Amir Ali Howlader of Bangladesh Musolli Committee, Rafiqul Islam of Jatya Party's Shyampur unit, Sarder Shahadat Hossain of Bangladesh Gonotantrik Party, Syed Belayet Hossain of Islami Shashantantra Andolon, Tafazzul Aziz of Khatmen Nabuwat Andolon, Zafarullah Khan of Khalafat Andolon and Jamal Nasser Chowdhury of Aamra Dhakabashi also took part.

Depression

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40 kph, rising up to 50 kph in gusts or squalls. Sea will remain moderate.

Maritime ports of Chittagong, Cox's Bazar and Mongla have been advised to host distant cautionary signal number one.

All fishing boats and trawlers in the north Bay and deep sea have been advised to come close to the coast and proceed with caution.

Another 'robber'

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police (SP) of Noakhali himself arrested one Meraj, 28, near Karing Char.

The coastal guard arrested Habib Ullah, 30, and Main Uddin, 28, from Boer Char during a routine search operation.

Police suspect there are 15 to 20 more robbers still at large deep in the jungles of the char areas.

Frustration congeals

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in the then president AQM Badruddoza Chowdhury.

A cabinet minister said holding of parliamentary party meetings depended on the leader of the House and it was not proper for any lawmaker to raise this issue.

So far the company has generated about \$2 billion in business from the March contract and more than \$2 billion from the logistics contract for which it supplies services ranging from delivering mail to doing laundry for US troops.

Democratic lawmakers have complained loudly to the Bush administration about the amount of work given to Halliburton in Iraq and have accused the White House of cronyism because of Cheney's former links to the firm, a claim the vice-president has vigorously denied.

Democratic presidential hopeful Howard Dean and Wesley Clark sought to make mileage from the audit findings.

Dean, referring to the Bush administration decision to bar Iraq war opponents from bidding on lucrative reconstruction contracts, said in a statement: "Now this president is preventing entire nations from bidding on contracts in Iraq so that his campaign contributors can continue to overcharge American taxpayers."

Clark spokesman Chris Lehane said: "George W. Bush is a president for Big Oil, Big Oil, and buy' Big Oil. He is more concerned about the success of Halliburton than having a success strategy in Iraq."

Tanguar haor

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from time to time.

The environment and finance ministries provided Tk 25 lakh for the drive that started a few weeks ago.

About 2500 pieces of illegal finemesh nets worth Tk 15 lakh were seized during the drive till Tuesday.

People of the area cooperated in the drive. The elements, who were caught and removed from the water body as 'lessers of the illegal occupants' tried to create problems but failed.

Plunder of the haor resources continued so long as the groups involved in it allegedly enjoyed backing from leaders of the successive ruling parties.

IT course

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The three-day WSIS began in the Swiss city of Geneva Wednesday and was attended by more than 8,000 delegates with 60 heads of state or government.

Khaleda said Bangladesh has adopted information and communications technology (ICT) as a key instrument for accelerating growth and poverty alleviation.

"As a developing country with resource constraints, Bangladesh has decided to give high priority to the millennium goals and the concept of Information Society," she added.

The prime minister expressed her belief that Information Society will help achieve millennium goals with cooperation and collaboration among the nations, strong political will and adequate network infrastructure.

She narrated the measures taken by her government for promotion of ICT.

"We have initiated e-governance and e-commerce and are about to enact the IT law and amend existing IPLaw," she said.

Khaleda also focused on liberalisation of telecommunications regulation and abolishing taxes on computer accessories.

Estonian President Arnold Ruupel, Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev and Niger Prime Minister Hama Amadou were, among others, present.

CDC Globelec

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This acquisition follows CDC Globelec's purchase of Keivin (1600 MW coal-fired power station serving at Johannesburg) and Songas (a 110 MW gas to electricity project in Tanzania, which is under construction) earlier this year.

CDC Globelec, the emerging markets power company of CDC Group plc, provides power to people and industry in emerging markets. It creates value for its shareholders and co-investors by helping to relieve a critical constraint to economic and social development.

CDC Globelec has a portfolio of generation and distribution assets with a net capacity of 2,540 MW in Latin America, Africa and Asia, and is actively engaged in acquiring additional assets, the press release added.

Ctg cellphone

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of a hybrid exchange to establish a multi-platform telephone exchange both for public and private operators," BTRC Chairman Syed Marghub Murshed told The Daily Star.

Currently, the telephone exchanges are bilateral having connectivity from one operator to another. Installation of a hybrid exchange will enable operators to use more than one operator exchange.

The BTRC chairman said, "If the project yields quality service, such projects will also be copied in other cities."

Hybrid exchanges have been installed in Nepal on an experimental basis and they have proved a success, he mentioned.

Another official said the proposed exchange would be a common platform of private and public operators and would also work for the first internet exchange. It will have 12,000-line circuit capacity enabling 1.20 lakh people to talk at a time.

There are around 1.50 million mobile phone users, of whom 90 percent do not have fixed phone connectivity.

Four private operators -- GramenPhone, AKTEL, City Cell and Sheba -- are financing a US\$ 2 million turnkey project to expand the BTTB's network. When completed, cellphone operators will get two lakh more connections with the fixed phone network of the BTTB.

The country has about seven lakh fixed line phones provided by the BTTB.

RU Golden Jubilee

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its 15 subcommittees were formed with teachers aligned with the ruling coalition, avoiding the 33 members of the senate, RUTA leaders, RU Alumni Association and the Progressive Teachers' Group, said Ahmed, also a RU senate member.

"A number of students are also not taking part in the long-cherished celebration as the chancellor was ignored," said RU syndicate member Professor Sohrab Ali.

Many pro-BNP teachers are also backing out of the programme, linking the vice-chancellor to the Jama'at-e-Islami, part of the ruling alliance.

Several other teachers said the pro-vice-chancellor, Shahadat Hossain Mondol, was also left out of the organising committee.

Mondol went close to regretting: "It will be unlucky, if such a thing happens."

Dr Saidur Rahman Khan, former RU VC, said the authorities should have involved all in the celebrations of the university home to 900 teach-

ers, 2,000 officials and employees and 24,000 students, with more than one lakh students having so far passed.

Bangladesh Chhatra League, Samajtantrik Chhatra Front, Progotshil Chhatra Alliance followed suit and decided to stay off the event.

"I feel discouraged, as we have no guidelines from our teachers on how to observe the occasion," said Rakibul Hasan, a student.

But enthusiasm runs high among the organisers. In a press conference at the Senate Bhaban yesterday, the vice-chancellor announced the RU would spend about Tk 1 crore on the three-day programme with the prime minister to launch.

He described the pro-boycott group as insignificant, as 3,900 people registered to join the function.

On not inviting the president to the golden jubilee celebrations, he said, "How can we invite him to the function where the prime minister is the chief guest?"

"All teachers were unanimous in inviting the prime minister and it was the right decision," he said.

He refuted the allegations of politicisation and said many members of the Progressive Teachers' Group were on the committees except for one who backed out.

Hartal

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state-owned enterprises and privatisation, demand implementation of the CHT peace accord and save the country from the hands of the World Bank and IMF.

On completion of their whirlwind campaign across the country in support of the hartal programme, the 11-party leaders campaigned in the capital over the last couple of days in favour of today's hartal.

A press release of the alliance yesterday said a number of its leaders were injured following attacks by 'BNP-Jamaat criminals' on their processions yesterday in different parts of the country.

Processions brought out in support of today's shutdown came under attack in Madaripur, Bagerhat and Barisal. The government supporters also tried to snatch mikes from the pickets, it said.

In a statement, alliance coordinator Rashed Khan Menon condemned the attacks and called upon the countrymen to remain calm despite such "conspiratorial provocation" and take forward the movement.

He said such attacks against the democratic rights of the people would only strengthen the ongoing move.

Rallies were organised at Paltan and Pallabi to drum up the mass-strike programme.

The stretch of wall sold at auction stands on a vacant plot of 650 square metres. The lot comes with building permission, but the sale was on condition that the wall itself cannot be moved or broken up.

The entire wall encircled what was then West Berlin. More than 230 people are estimated to have died in attempts to cross it during its existence.

Other sections of the wall have long since been dismantled and often sold, many abroad where the fascination for the Cold War relic is stronger than in reunified Germany itself.

B Chy: Platform

FROM PAGE 12

ruption, terrorism and issues relating to good governance.

Despite repeated requests from the people he met, Badruddoza would not form a political party at this moment rather concentrate more on the convergence of people on a platform and spelling out precise guidelines before the nation to help resolve the burning issues.

As part of informal consultations, some former BNP leaders, including ex-ministers and MPs, and businessmen and chartered accountants met him yesterday and exchanged views on the prevailing situation.

On January 6, the former president would meet with Supreme Court Bar leaders and discuss the current situation and seek their opinions.

Political observers feel that though Prof Badruddoza Chowdhury and Dr Kamal Hossain have undertaken similar initiatives they are both maintaining a safe distance.

Although Badruddoza openly

stated that if invited he would attend the proposed national convention to be called by Dr Kamal Hossain, it is less likely that the two leaders will mount one platform at this juncture.

Dr Kamal is now abroad. It is to be seen if the two leaders sit across the table or pick up telephones to discuss their initiatives.

Meanwhile, both ruling BNP and opposition Awami League are closely scrutinising various statements of Prof Badruddoza and Dr Kamal Hossain and their future programmes.

Some analysts say that mobilisation of the dissenting section of the civil society will help strengthen the opposition's future anti-government agitation, but Awami League strategists will not accept Prof Badruddoza or Dr Hossain taking the lead.

Keeping it in mind, Awami League president Sheikh Hasina has decided to spell out her party's action programme from her party's planned rally at Paltan Maidan on January 10.

Death in custody

FROM PAGE 1

sent a trader to them asking for Tk 50,000 in cash in exchange for Rony's release, an offer they turned down instantly.

Ujjal told The Daily Star that he would file a case against the policemen and demanded the presence of a magistrate during Rony's autopsy.

The duty officer of Sabujbagh Police Station said Rony was arrested in a good health and was taken to the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's court the next day.

"He was in good health when he was produced before the court," he added.

A jail official said Rony was not sick when he was taken to the jail, but he complained of health problems in the early hours of yesterday.

He was sent to the jail hospital and then shifted to the DMCH as his pulse went irregular.

Police accused Rony of a murky

past, saying he was arrested on warrant orders and charges of possessing arms and exploding bombs in 2001, extorting money in 1998 and 1999 and stabbing a young man were pressed against him in seven out of nine cases recorded against him.

They claimed that Rony was 26-year-old and ran a seedy Pensidyl drugs business, contradicting the family's claim of childhood and schoolboy status.

Rising cases of torture and death in police and jail custody have drawn widespread criticism of rights groups.

A survey report of Odhakar, a rights group, says 56 people were killed by law enforcers and 61 others died in police and jail custody in the first nine months of the current year.

Another survey of Mass-line Media Centre says 1,859 people were victimised by law enforcers in 441 incidents in the first 11 months of this year.

Hasina: Ruling alliance

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party central office in Dhaka.

About the recent arms haul in Kuril-Badda area of the capital, she said probe into such a big haul has made no headway yet probably because ruling alliance men are involved in the crime.

Hasina was critical of a 'bhaban' and said, "Every businessman has to pay commission to that bhaban."