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NEWS BRIEFS

Hasina shocked

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday expressed her deep shock at the death of noted musician Debu Bhattacharya. In a message, she said Bhattacharya was a luminous star in the field of country's music, reports UNB.

DU opens today

All classes of the Dhaka University will resume today after a 41-day long holy Eid and summer vacation. The university was closed from May 21 to June 30, reports UNB.

Arafat's triumphant return to Gaza

GAZA CITY, July 1: Yasser Arafat made a triumphant entry into the newly autonomous Gaza Strip today to cap a 27-year odyssey from guerilla fighter to government leader, reports AP.

After shaking the hand of an Israeli general at the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, the man who symbolises the Palestinian quest for a homeland dropped to his knees and kissed the ground.

Walking through the border gate, he was engulfed by dozens of police who raised him aloft as he gestured with a "V" for victory sign. Some police held up AK-47 automatic rifles.

Thousands of jubilant supporters waved green, red, black and white Palestinian flags.

In Gaza City, Arafat addressed a cheering throng of 70,000 supporters.

"I want to remind you that we have a big mission ahead of us, a big mission to build this homeland, to build our institutions, and to rebuild the insti-

tutions that Israeli occupation destroyed," Arafat said in his 25-minute speech, which was repeatedly drowned out by cheers.

In a pledge with particular resonance, Arafat said: "We have promised our martyrs that we will pray in Jerusalem."

GAZA CITY, July 1: Police detained a Palestinian in the mistaken belief that he had concealed a pistol in photographic equipment in a bid to kill Arafat, Gaza City police chief told AFP.

Palestinians consider the Arab sector of the city the capital of a future independent state, and its status is the most difficult question in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

The hastily arranged visit, anxiously awaited since Gaza and the West Bank town of Jericho were granted a measure of self-rule in May, touched off violence by Arab extremists and protests and threats by outraged Jews. His arrival symbolises for many a major step toward Palestinian statehood.

As he reached Gaza City, hundreds of people ran to the street and forced his convoy to slow down and thousands greeted him at the old Parliament building, where Israel's army had its headquarters.

Three Palestinians were crushed as a tree collapsed under the weight of all people perched in it straining for a glimpse of Arafat.

The accident happened as tens of thousands crammed into the Square of the Unknown Soldier in the heart of Gaza City where Arafat was due to give a speech.

Palestinians said many people stayed home because they had not expected the perennially late Arafat so soon. Many waited around TV sets for a speech they thought he would make in Rafah.

Arafat, who wore his customary olive green uniform and checkered headdress, crossed into Gaza at 3:15 pm (12:15 GMT) from Egypt, after being accompanied to the border.

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PLO leader Yasser Arafat listens to Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak during a press conference in Cairo yesterday prior to his historic visit to the Gaza Strip. — AFP photo

Opposition MPs discuss bill on electoral reform today

By Staff Correspondent

Opposition MPs in Parliament meet this afternoon to discuss the latest political situation, following the introduction of the bill in the House by the ruling party to strengthen the Election Commission.

Opposition Chief Whip Mohammad Nasim told The Daily Star that at the meeting at the Parliament building the party leaders would get the feedback from the MPs many of whom had recently visited their respective constituencies.

"The leaders will also brief

the MPs," he said.

MPs belonging to the Awami League, the Jatiya Party and the Jamaat are to attend the meeting expected to be chaired by Deputy Leader of the Opposition Abdus Samad Azad.

The Gano Forum, the Workers' Party and the IOJ MPs have already distanced themselves from the major parties now boycotting Parliament.

Gano Forum MP Shamsuddoha told The Daily Star that they are stressing the holding of a national dialogue among the political parties to resolve the crisis.

"We are in favour of a dialogue," Doha said, ruling out any possibility of joining the JS

session immediately, speculated earlier.

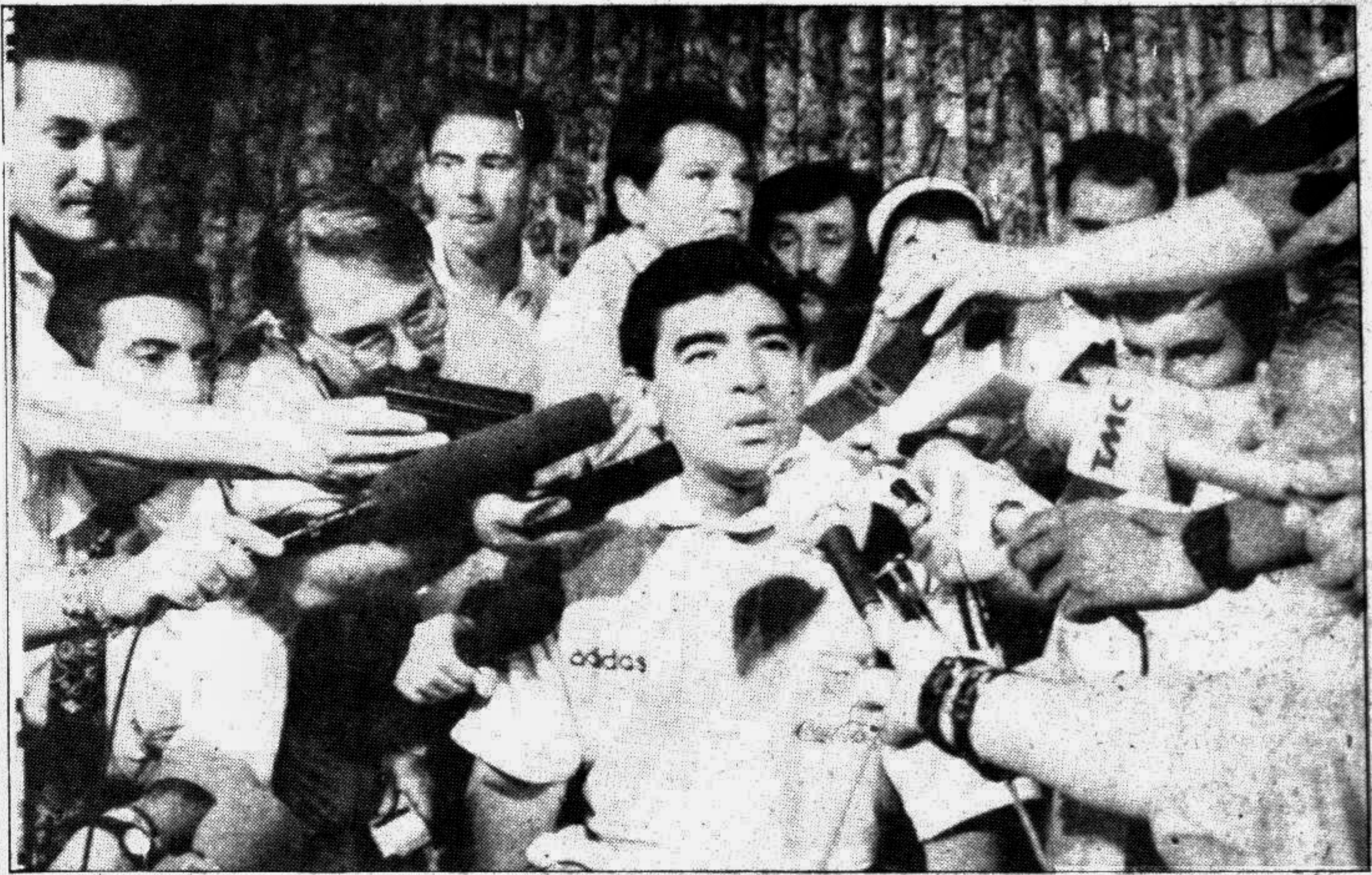
He said two of the party MPs would take a final decision on July 5 at a meeting with their leader Dr Kamal Hossain, due to return from the UK a day before.

He said they were trying to maintain contacts with other boycotting MPs.

"Another opposition MP said the precondition set by the major opposition was the main obstacle to holding a national dialogue.

Ruling party sources said they were ready to hold a dialogue on outstanding political issues but the opposition parties maintained they would

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Argentine soccer superstar Diego Maradona is surrounded by journalists yesterday during a press conference at the Sheraton Hotel in Dallas where he is staying after being suspended by FIFA from the World Cup for having failed a random drug test. — AFP photo

Maradona denies wrongdoing

BUENOS AIRES, July 1: Diego Maradona, thrown out of the World Cup for drug use, said on television here Thursday he would never play again, reports AFP.

"It's finished for me," said the Argentine captain who was suspended from football until his case is reviewed after the World Cup.

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"I had paid my dues and now they have hit me on the head and cut my legs off," said a clearly distraught Maradona.

He swore on his daughters' heads he had not taken drugs. The Argentine Football Association withdrew the 33-year-old after he failed a drugs test for ephedrine to calm a media storm and "protect the player's reputation."

Maradona added: "When I took drugs I admitted it. I went to the judge and I said

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Knockout stage begins today

UNDATED, July 1: Down to the final 16. And although there may not be any classic matchups for the ages in the second round of the World Cup, there are some intriguing pairings, reports AP.

With the field finally set, the closest to a Goliath vs Goliath match is Germany vs Belgium on Saturday at Chicago.

But the Americans clash with pre-tournament favourites Brazil on the US Independence Day; Saudi Arabia may have the upper hand against Sweden in the sweltering Cotton Bowl on Sunday; and African champions Nigeria get a chance to assert themselves against European power Italy in Foxboro, Mass, on Tuesday.

In other matchups, Switzerland face Spain on Saturday in Washington; Romania play a demoralised Argentina on Sunday in

Pasadena, Calif; the Dutch meet the Irish in the heat of Orlando on Monday; while on Tuesday Mexico take on the Bulgarians in East Rutherford, NJ.



The Americans will be hoping a flood of red, white and blue on Monday in Stanford, Calif, will be enough to score one of the biggest upsets in World Cup history since their 1-0 victory over

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TONIGHT'S WORLD CUP MATCHES ON BT

Game 1: Germany vs Belgium at 23:00 (BST)
 Game 2: Spain vs Switzerland at 02:30 (BST)

94 killed in Mauritanian plane crash

NOUAKCHOTT, July 1: An Air Mauritania Fokker 28 crashed today, while landing at Tidjikja Airport in northern Mauritania, killing 94 people, with six babies and 25 children among the dead, aviation officials said here, reports AFP.

Preliminary reports indicated there were about 15 survivors aboard the Fokker 28 when it crashed as it was landing at Tidjikja, in a mountainous region of Mauritania.

Most of the passengers were Mauritians, the Mauritanian Press Agency said.

The plane was on a domestic flight from Nouakchott to Tidjikja, a regional capital about 400 kilometers (250 miles) east of Nouakchott, the agency said.

The plane went down shortly after 9:00 am (0900 GMT). Rescue crews were at work searching for victims and aiding survivors, the agency said.

The cause of the crash was not immediately known.

Biman, bank boycott for Sylhet Divn begins

From Our Correspondent

SYLHET, July 1: The number of Biman passengers fell sharply in the Sylhet-Dhaka route today, the first day of the 'Biman and bank boycott' programme called to press the demand for a new administrative division in Sylhet.

One hundred passengers, 29 of them domestic and 71 of international route left Sylhet for Dhaka in three scheduled flights today. The total number of scheduled passengers was 250.

The 'Division Implementation and Greater Sylhet Development Action Council' began the 'Biman and bank boycott' programme today.

Minister's car attacked in Sylhet

Some activists of a pro-Islamic group attacked and damaged the private car of Jute Minister Hannah Shah near Court Point in Sylhet town yesterday, police and eyewitness said, reports UNB.

However, the minister and his wife, were unhurt. The minister's car came under attack of brick-throwing protesters when it was passing by a rally organised by 'Murad-NGO Opoitporata Proti-rodh Morcha' after juma prayers to protest Thursday's police action in Kishoreganj and Narshingdi.

The demonstrators who broke window-glass of the car alleged that the car knocked down an old man who came to attend the rally.

Police on duty dispersed the mob and made the passage for the car.

World Cup causes truancy at BUET

By Staff Correspondent

The World Cup fever has affected the BUET students so much that the authorities had to issue a press release asking them to attend classes.

The BUET Academic Council also held an emergency meeting on June 27 to discuss the absence from classes of the first and second year students since June 19.

The academic council expressed its concern over the deliberate absence of the soccer-crazy students and issued letters to their parents requesting them to send their words to classes.

In the press release, the authorities of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) further said, some students of the

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No decision yet to scrap importers' passbooks

By Inam Ahmed

Any immediate decision on the scrapping of passbook system for manufacturing importers seems to be unlikely in spite of demands for withdrawal of the system both from the business and banking circles.

The authorities concerned including the office of the Chief Controller of Import and Export (CCI&E), the Bangladesh Bank and the Commerce Ministry are convinced about the need for withdrawal of the system. But sources pointed out, a final decision on the issue has not come about in over two years hampering the government's efforts for the growth of free market economy promoting competitiveness.

The passbook is issued by

the CCI&E office, in favour of a client allocating certain amount of import, but the operation is reserved to a specific bank.

The logic behind the passbook system was to restrict over import and to control debt default by importers. With the passbook system, the importer could not switch over to another bank for LC opening while keeping his payment for previous imports pending with other banks.

Under this system, an importer has to go for all his LC openings with the bank specified in the passbook. The system had later been waived for the free items.

But the bankers and importers now feel that the sys-

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BLUE CROSS SCORE BOARD
 World Cup USA 94

FRIDAY'S RESULTS
 Group D: Nigeria 2: Greece 0
 Group D: Bulgaria 2: Argentina 0

Following are the teams which have qualified for the second round knock-out stage of the 1994 World Cup: Romania, Switzerland, USA, Brazil, Sweden, Germany, Spain, Nigeria, Bulgaria, Argentina, Mexico, Ireland, Holland, Saudi Arabia and Belgium.

FIRST ROUND STANDINGS

Group A:	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Romania	3	2	0	1	5	5	6
Switzerland	3	1	1	1	5	4	4
USA	3	1	1	1	3	4	4
Colombia	3	1	0	2	4	5	3

Group D:	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Nigeria	3	2	0	1	6	2	6
Bulgaria	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Argentina	3	2	0	1	6	3	6
Greece	3	0	0	3	0	10	0

Group E:	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Brazil	3	2	1	0	6	1	7
Sweden	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
Russia	3	1	0	2	7	6	3
Cameroun	3	0	1	2	3	11	1

Group E:	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Mexico	3	1	1	1	3	3	4
Ireland	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Italy	3	1	1	1	2	2	4
Norway	3	1	1	1	1	4	4

Group C:	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Germany	3	2	1	0	5	3	7
Spain	3	1	2	0	6	4	5
S Korea	3	0	2	1	4	5	2
Bolivia	3	0	1	2	1	4	1

Group F:	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Holland	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
S Arabia	3	2	0	1	4	3	6
Belgium	3	2	0	1	2	1	6
Morocco	3	0	0	3	2	5	0

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Feasibility of housing project under study

By Asiuzzaman

The authorities are studying the feasibility of a housing project involving about 40,000 acres of land to overcome the acute housing crisis in Dhaka, Works and Housing Minister Rafiqul Islam Miah has said.

The Rajdhani Unnayan Katiripakkha (RAJUK) will implement the project, the biggest ever in any South Asian country, the minister told The Daily Star.

The project will have several sites — in the city and in Savar, Manikganj and Joydebpur. The low-lying areas of the project sites will be filled up by dredging the nearby rivers, the minister said.

The services of the army engineering corps are likely to be utilised in implementing the project, he added.

Meanwhile, RAJUK has taken up another housing pro-

Presidents of two Koreas to hold 2 semi-private meets

SEOUL, July 1: The presidents of North and South Korea will hold two semi-private meetings during their upcoming summit, officials from both countries agreed today, reports AP.

But the two sides squabbled over other logistics for the historic meeting, set for July 25-27 in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang. South Korean officials said. Disputed issues included television coverage and travel to the North by South Korean advance teams.

Following five hours of talks in the border village of Panmunjom — the first session to plan the summit — negotiators agreed to meet again Saturday to try to iron out remaining differences.

The summit is intended to ease tensions over suspicions the North is building nuclear weapons. Northern officials insist their nuclear programme is peaceful, but have refused to

allow full inspections to prove it.

The summit was agreed to after the North told former US President Jimmy Carter last month it wanted to resolve the dispute. The United States has also agreed to reopen high-level talks with North Korea on July 8.

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At the summit, the North had wanted its President, Kim Il Sung, and South Korean President Kim Young-sam to hold only a single negotiating session in the presence of a large contingent of aides.

But at today's session, it agreed to two sessions at which the two presidents will be joined by only one or two top officials, South Korean negotiators said.

The South wants to send two 20-member advance teams the first as early as Tuesday. North Korea insisted

that an advance team come only two or three days before the summit.

The North also rejected South Korean proposals for live TV coverage of the summit, insisting that tape and film be transported out by courier.

The northern side's lack of understanding of international practices regarding summit talks blocked agreement, chief South Korean negotiator Yoon Yo-jun said afterward.

North Korea, however, accepted the Seoul government's proposal to send a 100-member official entourage and 80-member press corps, South Korean officials said.

The South has been trying to offer the North incentives to resolve the nuclear issue. On Friday, Finance Minister Kim Chul-su reaffirmed that the North could expect economic assistance including direct trade, joint ventures and investment if the dispute were settled.