

## US pressing Pakistan, India for dialogue

WASHINGTON, Dec 7: Washington is pressing India and Pakistan to settle their differences through negotiations, a senior State Department official said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

"Our greatest concern for stability in South Asia is the underlying tension between India and Pakistan," Assistant Secretary for South Asian Affairs Robin Raphael told the House of Representatives' Asia and the Pacific Subcommittee.

"Although there is no immediate threat of war, relations between the two are bad and show no sign of improving. There has been no high-level bilateral dialogue in almost two years."

"It is of great importance for India and Pakistan to resume talks. We urge the governments to exploit the opportunities for dialogue wherever they arise," Raphael said.

She said the United States was ready to help India and Pakistan resolve tensions over Kashmir, but only if both countries asked for US assistance.

"Meanwhile, we have urged India to take the necessary steps to engage Kashmiris in a genuine dialogue on their future. We have repeatedly urged Pakistan to end mate-

rial support for Kashmir militants as a step toward lowering tensions. We have also engaged Kashmiri leaders in an effort to get them to think creatively about political solutions."

Raphael also urged India and Pakistan to tone down their rhetoric against each other and to withdraw their troops from the Siachen Glacier.

AFP adds: India has complained to the United States about the "undiplomatic language" used by a State Department official responding to an Indian minister's charges of US interference in Kashmir.

Vinod Grover, a senior External Affairs Ministry, summoned the US Charge D'Affaires in Delhi Wednesday to express India's displeasure over the comments by the State Department official, newspapers said today.

The unidentified State Department official was quoted as saying in Indian press reports from Washington that Chavan's charges, made on Tuesday in Indian Parliament, were "utter nonsense."

Chavan accused the United States of harbouring 'evil designs' on Kashmir. He also accused Washington of backing Islamabad in stirring up trouble in the border state.



Awami League President Sheikh Hasina addressing a public meeting at Panthapath in the city yesterday. — Star photo

## Parleys on for dialogue

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Talking to The Daily Star and some other dailies at his Bailey Road official residence last night, Talukdar said the contacts were at the high level. But he did not elaborate.

Asked if the PM would resign 30 days before the next general elections, he said, "If the PM resigns, then who will succeed her? Why should she (the PM) create a constitutional crisis unless a consensus is reached (by the two parties) on the matter?"

When his attention was drawn to the President exercising his residuary power

to form an interim government following the PM's resignation and her party's refusal to head such government, the BNP leader observed that the issues were inter-linked and could only be addressed after a consensus was reached.

Replying to a question on rescheduling the election date, already announced by the Election Commission (EC), Talukdar, who is also the LGRD Minister, said, "It's an act of the EC which could consult the contesting parties on the matter."

According to the sources, the on-going parleys between the BNP and the AL, mostly

through telephone, aims at arranging a dialogue between the BNP chairperson and Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia and AL chief Sheikh Hasina.

"If the attempts succeed, the Prime Minister, as per her earlier commitment, would step down along with her cabinet to pave the way for the President to consult the major political parties on the formation of an interim government," said a senior BNP leader, adding in that case the President might also seek a reference of the Supreme Court.

## Police action barbaric, says Zillur

The Awami League strongly protested the "police firing and tear-gas shelling" on its rally at Panthapath yesterday when party president Sheikh Hasina was delivering her speech, reports UNB.

In a statement, party's general secretary Zillur Rahman termed the police action "barbaric" and said that police had opened fire and burst tear-gas shells on their peaceful assembly.

He said: "This demonstrates that neo-autocrat Begum Khaleda Zia resorted to heinous means, the way autocrat Ershad had launched attack on Hasina in Chittagong on January 24, 1988."

People still remember the remarks of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal leaders in presence of Begum Zia to establish a Hasina-free Bangladesh," Zillur said. "With that objective, indiscriminate fire was opened yesterday aiming at Hasina," he alleged.

He claimed that more than 1,000 Awami League leaders and workers were injured in police action.

Under the cover of police, armed terrorists of the BNP also launched attack on the people, Zillur said, adding that many innocent pedestrians were also injured in their attack.

The AL general secretary said: "The last mask of this so-called democratic government was unveiled through yesterday's naked attack on peaceful demonstrations."

## Saiful murder Half-day hartal called at Mirpur

Local people at Mirpur today called a half-day hartal there to protest the killing of Saiful Azam Khan, a contractor of the area.

They also brought out a procession demanding the arrest of the culprits. None was arrested till last night.

Saiful Azam Khan alias Chandan, 38, died of bullet injury in his chest on Wednesday.

## Rail, road links disrupted

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dent reports, thousands of passengers including women and children remained stranded at Aricha, Nagarbari and Daulatdia ghats yesterday.

The BIWTC is now operating smaller size ferries having lesser capacity to avoid getting stranded in the shallow channel in the river Jamuna. This has resulted in a tremendous traffic jam on both sides of the river.

Perishable goods like banana and green vegetables have started rotting in Dhaka-bound buses.

Among other vehicles, hundreds of trucks carrying

## One beaten to death allegedly by police

From Our Correspondent

MOULVIBAZAR, Dec 7: A Freedom Fighter was allegedly beaten to death after being arrested by the police last night at Borelekha thana of the district.

According to witnesses, a police team from Borelekha thana led by SI Kajal Borua and ASI Kabir went to village Nandua under the Borelekha thana of the district to arrest one Rayub Ali, 50, a Freedom Fighter and son of Kutul Ali.

After being arrested, Rayub Ali was allegedly tortured. Hearing the hue and cry people of the area rescued him and sent him to the local Union Health Complex. Later, he succumbed to his injury. Agitated people detained the police team for few hours. They were released by local UP Chairman later.

Deputy Commissioner and Police Super of Moulvibazar visited the spot and constituted a probe body with a First-class Magistrate and an ASP. Elder brother of the victim registered a murder case against 9 persons including 8 policemen.

## President can form caretaker govt to ensure fair polls: Jamaat

Jamaat-e-Islami leaders yesterday once again demanded for immediate resignation of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia to help the formation of a caretaker government to supervise the elections, reports UNB.

They said the President, after consulting with the Supreme Court, constitutional experts and the political parties, can form a caretaker government constitutionally to ensure a free and fair elections.

"If the Prime Minister has a little faith in democracy and any respect for the opposition political parties, she should resign," Jamaat Secretary General Muttar Rahman Nizami told a rally at the North Gate of Baitul Mokarram shortly before leading march towards the PM's office in the afternoon.

He said the movement for a caretaker government was not for ousting any individual from power or placing another in the chair. "This is for ensuring an elections free from party influence, terrorism and black money," he said.

fuel oil, gas, emergency medicines and other goods bound for 36 districts of the south-west and north-west region have been stranded at Aricha ghat creating a possibility of country-wide crisis.

Our Gaibandha correspondent reports, the railway ferry service between Teestamuk ghat and Bahadurabad ghat remained snapped since Wednesday due to rapid siltation of the ferry channel at Kalasona point, eight kilometre off Teestamuk ghat.

Our Chittagong Correspondent informs that rail and road communication between Chittagong and other parts of the country remained suspended for the second consecutive day yesterday as the striking jute and textile mills workers put up barricades on Dhaka-Chittagong highway stretching from Ishpani crossing to Sitakundu.

The agitating workers numbering over 2000 also staged demonstration and held rallies in support of their demands.

No train left Chittagong for the last two days. However, railway sources informed that they were expecting to resume train communication with Dhaka from late last night.

## HC declares Karim, upon a habeas corpus writ petition also ordered release of the detenu if he is not wanted in any other case.

On Tuesday last he got bail from the HC in the Alam murder case.

A N M Gazil Huq, Senior Advocate, moved for Joynal Hazari.

## JP rally

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Mizan Chowdhury said the PM must resign and participation of the opposition parties in the next elections should not be made a precondition for this.

The opposition parties would not allow the holding of elections except under a caretaker government, he added.

Moudud Ahmed said that the solution to the present political impasse depended on the resignation of the Prime Minister. The election schedule announced by the EC has to be cancelled, he added.

Anwar Hossain Manju said that the BNP government would be forced to step down under public pressure.

Kazi Zafar Ahmed said that the ruling party must quit power if wanted to save itself from disgrace.

The JP activists were dispersed by police as they resorted to violence on Tongi diversion road while marching towards the PM's Secretariat.

## 50 hurt, 12 vehicles set afire

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Abdus Sattar, Akhter, Kazi Mofizur Rahman and fire fighter Shah Alam — were admitted to the Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH).

The opposition activists set ablaze at least a dozen of vehicles including a BRTC double decker, private cars, micro buses and auto rickshaws. Those were set afire in Kalabagan, Noor Jahan Road, Mottijheel, TSC, Mog-bazar and Shahbagh areas.

Besides, scores of other automobiles were damaged, including an ambulance and a staff car of the Foreign Ministry. Many of the vehicles were damaged at Tongi Diversion Road and in the adjacent areas.

A few minutes after AL chief Sheikh Hasina began delivering her presidential address at the Panthapath rally at around 4:30 pm, there was sound of explosion of crackers as a militant group of party activists with sticks in their hands joined the rally. While the meeting was proceeding in a peaceful manner, police in an unprovoked action started lobbing tear gas shells towards the meeting. This created panic.

At one stage, police fired rubber bullets to being the situation under control.

Witnesses said, police also used water cannon as the AL activists retaliated the police action and hurled crackers

indiscriminately during the two-hour long battle. The unprovoked police action during the speech of the AL chief created tremendous resentment among AL activists, who threw crackers at the police. Sheikh Hasina continued to speak for a while during the police action.

The AL President then cut short her speech and left the podium boarding Nissan Petrol jeep.

The participants and activists ran in all directions to escape smoke of gas and rubber bullets and took shelter at residential houses in alleys on both sides of the Panthapath.

A section of the agitated AL workers pelted brick bats at police and set fire at places on the road. AL leaders Abdus Samad Azad, Abdul Mannan and Suranjit Sen Gupta also took shelter inside a four-storey building, where some journalists also took refuge.

At this stage, all roads leading to the Panthapath, Kalabagan, and Green Road areas were blocked to traffic.

AL General Secretary Zillur Rahman, in a statement last night, condemned 'firing on Sheikh Hasina' and alleged that 'armed terrorists' of the BNP under police protection also attacked people at the rally.

JP activists turned violent on Tongi Diversion Road, while marching towards Sonargaon Road after their rally. The activists used sticks and damaged vehicles.

Police came into action soon after the activists set an autorickshaw on fire. The JP procession faced police barricade near Sonargaon Road. A few rounds of gunfire were heard and several cocktails were also exploded.

Being chased by police, the agitating JP activists took shelter in nearby slums. The shopowners there put their shutters down during the melee.

Jamaat's march towards the PM's Secretariat was intercepted by police at Bangla Motor crossing.

Meanwhile, activists of the pro-AL BCL brought out a procession and held a rally on the Dhaka University campus protesting 'attack on AL rally' and set ablaze two vehicles and damaged five others.



Police lobbed tear gas shells at some agitators yesterday on Mirpur Road in the city. — Star photo

## SAARC enters second decade

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SAARC countries.

The regional organisation over the last 10 years has been able to hold eight summit-level meetings. The last SAARC summit was held in New Delhi from May 2 to 4. The venue of the next summit is likely to be Male, the capital of the Maldives. However, the final decision about the date and venue will be taken at the 16th session of the Council of SAARC Ministers scheduled to be held at the Indian capital on December 18 and 19. Bhutan is the only country which could not arrange a summit, presumably for lack of infrastructural facilities.

The decade-old organisation has set up 12 technical committees and primarily charted 12 areas of cooperation. Besides, there have been

hundreds of meetings on various related subjects and exchange of delegations among the member countries.

The South Asian Preferential Trade Arrangement (SAPTA), an umbrella for greater economic cooperation among the members by offering tariff concessions on various items, has been a success story of the decade-old organisation's attempt to consolidate the regional body.

Although the SAARC is graduating into its second decade, there have been criticisms that it had failed to bring the countries of the region closer, particularly in creating a congenial atmosphere of cooperation because of several outstanding bilateral issues between the neighbouring countries. The SAARC charter prevents raising bilateral issues at the summit or

other official meetings, although, on many occasion, leaders had taken the opportunity to discuss bilateral issues.

In an interview with The Daily Star at the end of the seventh SAARC summit, former Secretary General of SAARC, YK Silwal, however, described the performance of the organisation on an optimistic note, which is shared by many in the region.

"Despite differences among countries, we had been able to strengthen SAARC as an institution. We had several summits. And all heads of government participated in all the summits. They attended the summits despite their domestic preoccupations. This itself speaks of the importance that each nation attaches to SAARC," he said.

## SAPTA

"The idea is to gradually liberalize trade in the region," SAARC Secretary General Yadad Kant Silwal said.

Barriers will be dismantled in phases, starting with a 10 per cent reduction in tariffs on a total of 224 items, he said.

Non tariff-barriers such as quotas and other trade restrictions will be dealt with at a later stage under the scheme.

With SAPTA coming into force, Sri Lankan tea, Bangladeshi jute products, and Indian textiles are expected to be cheaper for the people of the region.

Likewise prices will come down on Pakistani cotton, seafood from the Maldives and Nepalese timber, according to regional economists.

## The Midnight File

### Oil tanker blast kills 10 in Iraq

GENEVA, Dec 7: At least 10 people, including two United Nations guards, were killed and 30 were injured today when a fuel tanker exploded in northern Iraq, a UN spokeswoman said, reports Reuter.

### File on Rajiv murder

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Commerce Minister P. Chidambaram told Parliament.

The independent Jain Commission in investigating Gandhi's murder in 1991 by a woman suicide bomber who has been identified by the government as a Sri Lankan Tamil.

Chidambaram was appointed by Rao to oversee progress in the investigation following Opposition charges that the probe had stalled. He said the lost file related to another Commission's inquiry into Gandhi's death.

"A special team of officers was constituted to search for the file," Chidambaram said to boos, hissing and cries of "shame, shame" from Opposition members.

The law ministry also conducted a search, however, despite the best efforts, the file could not be traced.

He said, without providing any details about the contents of the file.

Leaders of a breakaway faction of Rao's Congress Party criticised the Prime Minister for being absent from the debate and for choosing a junior minister to make the statement. The faction walked out of Parliament before Chidambaram began speaking.

### Forex reserve

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year. Apprehensions are there that this might reach a double-digit level unless food prices are stabilised.

The trade gap during the first quarter of this fiscal year registered a deficit of 678 million dollars as against a deficit of 268 million dollars during the corresponding period of 1994-95.

Imports during the July-September period of fiscal 1995-96 was 1739 million dollars, a 47.65 per cent rise from the corresponding period of last fiscal year.

"Such trend is putting pressure on the forex reserve," said the Finance Ministry source. "This is not a sustainable import programme which the government aims to check."

Already the government has devalued the currency a number of times and raised bank rates to check both imports and credit expansion in order to contain inflation.

### Shop owner stabbed to death

By Staff Correspondent

A teenaged grocery shop owner was stabbed to death at Azampur in Uttara in the city late Wednesday.

A gang of about five persons reportedly led by one Badal of the area attacked Fazar Ali, 19, in his house at Purbapara at about 10 pm. They indiscriminately stabbed Fazar who succumbed to injuries on way to Tongi hospital, police sources said.

### Bus fire

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The Noakhali-bound passenger bus was reportedly attacked with petrol bombs and caught fire at Jatrabari a few minutes after it left the Syedabad bus terminal at about 10:30 pm Monday.

Eight passengers of the bus were roasted alive while another succumbed on the next day.

Meanwhile, of the 11 injured passengers, one Saidur Rahman was under treatment at the DMCH while the rest were released, hospital sources said.

The bus was attacked as a sequel to rivalry between two groups fighting for gaining control of the terminal, according to reports.

No one has been arrested in this connection till last night while the report of Forensic Department, where samples from the burnt out bus was sent for tests, was not yet available, according to police.

Meanwhile, another driver of the transport company Green Star, Zahurul Islam, who was also travelling in the bus, filed a case against 14 people with the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's (CMM) court yesterday, according to sources.

### Electoral body

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While making the enquiries, the committee can, in writing, ask anybody to appear before it or depose under oath. The committee can also direct any person to present any document in his or her possession in connection with the pre-election irregularities before it.

The EC, on the basis of the report of the enquiry committee, can give punishment to any person or persons.

The EC, in the meantime, has asked the officers with whom the electorate enquiry committee has been formed to report to their place of duty immediately.

### Panic

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In many parts of the city, shopowners and street vendors were seen panicked during the clashes at Bangabandhu Avenue, Moghbazar, Nilkhet, Palashi, Kalabagan, Green Road and Mohakhali.

The Mirpur Road from Asad Gate point to Science Laboratory point remained nearly shut off for all motor vehicles from 4.30 pm to 8 pm as a series of clashes took place between the police and political activists.

At the same time, traffic movement also came to a standstill at adjacent Green Road, Kalabagan and Panthapath.

Near the Nilkhet Telephone Exchange at 5 pm, three truck loads of unidentified mob attacked rickshaws, baby taxis, buses and vendors indiscriminately with sticks. The mob damaged a good number of rickshaws, scooters, cars and buses and left after blasting homemade bombs.

"So it would be wrong to state they supported one position or another," she argued.

"We believe that it is upto the individual donors themselves to clarify their positions, if they wish to do so, and it would certainly be most presumptuous and inappropriate for the UNDP to speak on their behalf," Ms Watanabe said.

The UNDP, however, did not contradict the report and admitted that it did not endorse the strategy.

"While it is correct, as your article states, that UNDP did not sign the final statement, we appreciate that the meeting considered issues of people's participation and the role of NGOs more intensively than in previous occasions, and it is our hope that the strategy will continue to evolve towards the direction of a more broad-based public debate and towards giving priority to poverty alleviation as the paramount criteria in the selection of projects," Watanabe said.

Pressure in the city market has meanwhile increased two folds. Many city dwellers have finished their daily bazaar as the three-day hartal would begin from Saturday.