

India rejects US call to stop 'Prithvi' test

NEW DELHI, Feb 4: Foreign Minister Pranab Mukherjee today rejected US calls to stop testing India's indigenous Prithvi missile and said its deployment would depend on the situation at the time, reports Reuters.

"There is no question of abandoning the Prithvi programme," Mukherjee said in an interview with the news agency Press Trust of India (PTI).

He said deployment of the medium-range missile which India successfully test-fired on January 27 would depend on whether any threat was perceived "and the situation prevailing at that point of time."

The test was followed by an increase in tension on India's border with Pakistan. Islamabad regards the Prithvi missile as having been developed specifically to be fired at Pakistan.

Mukherjee dismissed comments from the US State Department that it had been a mistake to test-fire the missile and the move would fuel instability in the sub-continent.

"We do not consider it a mistake," he told PTI. "We

have no intention of destabilising in any way the situation prevailing in the region."

Mukherjee said Pakistan was on a "buying spree" of military equipment including Mirage jet fighters, submarines and missiles.

"In this context and what had happened in the last four decades, India cannot compromise its security requirements," he said.

Asked whether there was an imminent threat of a new conflict, Mukherjee said: "Let us hope it will not be there."

He said nothing has been heard from Pakistan since India welcomed Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's statement last month suggesting the two countries hold a summit.

"We are ready for the talks at any level, be it political or official, at any time," he said. "I believe there may be a possibility in the near future."

Mukherjee declined to say whether India would sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) but pointed out that its position has been made known in the negotiations in Geneva.



People sleep out of doors following a massive earthquake in southwestern China's Yunnan province Saturday. This photo was taken from video footage by Chinese television. — AFP/UNB photo

I killed, 15 hurt as rivals clash in Natore

NATORE, Feb 4: At least one person was killed and about 15 others were injured, 10 of them seriously, during a clash between two rival groups at Halsa village of the sadar thana under Natore district on Saturday morning.

A dispute over potato cultivation was the cause of the clash.

The deceased was identified as Rajab Ali, 22. He died on the spot. Of the injured, three were admitted to Rajshahi Medical College hospital and ten to Natore sadar hospital. Three persons were arrested.

One 'tortured' to death by police in Natore

NATORE, Feb 4: One Habluddin, 21, was allegedly tortured to death by the police in village Guerlilabari of Lalpur thana of the district last night.

Habluddin, accused of burglary, was arrested by a police patrol at 2.30 am from the village. According to the villagers, the six-member patrol including three Assistant Sub-Inspectors, tortured Habluddin on the spot during which he died.

The villagers held the six policemen who denied the charges of torture. They were later released after the TNO and the OC of the thana intervened.

However, the Superintendent of Police of Natore district Aminal Islam, who visited the spot later told this correspondent that Habluddin apparently died of heart attack.

15 hurt as BNP factions clash in Pabna

PABNA, Feb 4: At least 15 people were injured, three seriously, in a clash between two rival groups in the town today, reports UNB.

Witnesses said the supporters of pourashava Chairman Sheikh Shaidullah Bachchu and JCD leader Anisul Haque Babu locked in the clash at 12 in the noon when two processions of the rival groups confronted at Kacharipara area.

The poura Chairman is a supporter of dissident BNP leader Azizur Rahman Arzu who is contesting as an independent from Pabna-5 (Sadar) constituency in the coming election while the JCD leader is a supporter of BNP candidate Rafiqul Islam Bakul.

A case was filed with Sadar police in this connection.

Chinese quake toll rises to 240

BEIJING, Feb 4: The deadliest earthquake to hit China in eight years has killed above 240 people, injured 14,000 and left hundreds of thousands of homeless huddled in freezing weather and jolted by aftershocks, officials said today, report agencies.

The Red Cross Society of China appealed for international aid, saying it had informed the International Red Cross and sent five medical teams and 900,000 yuan (dollar 108,000) worth of food, clothes, medicines and quilts to victims.

More than 2,000 People's Liberation Army troops were helping to dig out survivors in remote mountain villages.

The quake hit at 7:14 pm (11 h 14 gmt) Saturday, with its epicentre between Lijiang and Zhongdian counties in the northwest of the mountainous province, near its frontier with Tibet. The population is made up mainly of Tibetan and naxi minorities.

Eighteen aftershocks, most of magnitude 4, shook the area on Sunday, said a provincial official, who gave his name as Mr. Xia.

The heaviest casualties were in the county's remote two dozen villages, county officials said.

Sonargaon incident

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Twenty eight employees of the hotel, including some office-bearers of the employees union, were arrested on Wednesday last following filing of a case by the hotel's general manager.

This is an isolated incident. This will not strain the good bilateral relations between Japan and Bangladesh," said Mosharafullah, also joint secretary of the ministry of civil aviation and tourism. He was made MD of the hotel recently.

He said both the meetings decided to find out the cause of incident and try for an amicable settlement. "The [Japanese] Ambassador has assured his full cooperation in this regard."

Dwelling on the alleged irregularities done by the hotel management, he said, "It was detected that many purchases were made irregularly. Purchase of 1500 pieces of wrist watch for Taka 9.45 lac and printing of the 1996 diary for Taka 7 lac may be mentioned," he said.

Asked if there is any relationship between the alleged irregularities and the State Ministers' taking over as chairman of the hotel, the MD said, "the minister after his takeover had ordered the owning company to improve the financial performance of the hotel and make arrangement to recover in the next five years the accumulated

300 mw power plant MOU signed with US co

An American electricity generation company yesterday signed an accord with the authorities in Dhaka for setting up a 300-megawatt power plant in Bangladesh, reports UNB.

The power plant will involve an estimated investment of 310 million US dollars equivalent to Tk 1270 crore.

The memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was initiated by Mirza Tasadduk Hossain Beg, Joint Secretary of the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources, and Ashraf Alam, President of AI and Associates Inc. who is also president of the America-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce and Industry, officials said.

This is the 11th MOU signed since power generation opened up for private participation.

Dacoits swoop on trawlers

From Staff Correspondent
BARISAL, Feb 4: A group of 20 to 25 dacoits swooped on three fishing trawlers — FB Ruma, FB Anwar and FB Nurjahan — in the Bay of Bengal some 25 kilometres from Kuakata of Patuakhali last night. The dacoits looted fish, fishing nets, engine parts and about 7 lakh taka and beat the fishermen on board mercilessly.

According to the trawler owners Association of Patuakhali, the dacoits looted all the goods at gunpoint.

Vice Premier Wu Bangguo lead a disaster area yesterday to lead the rescue work by medical teams and about 2,000 soldiers and local militiamen. Xinhua said.

Rescuers searched for victims throughout the night, said Wang Ze, a provincial government spokesman. The evening television news showed a rescue worker carrying a quake victim on his back and medics attending to other victims lying on the ground on stretchers in the dark.

About 330,000 people live in the stricken area, the television report said.

"There are a lot of old buildings in the old part of town and there's a lot of damage there," said Don Lyton, an American who lives in Kunming and was visiting Lijiang.

The damage to the town's modern buildings appeared much less severe, he said.

Traffic jam at Aricha continues

MANIKGANJ, Feb 4: Some 1,000 trucks loaded with various kinds of goods remained stranded at Aricha, Nagarbari and Daulatdia ghats for the last 24 hours till Sunday afternoon due to inadequate ferry services, reports UNB.

Transport workers said more than 100 trucks are in the queue with perishable goods like fruits and vegetables.

"The traffic jam was caused by the post-hartal rush of vehicles to be plied through the Dhaka-Aricha highway," said Abdur Rashid, DGM of Aricha Sector of BWT while talking to UNB.

He also said the transportation capacity of the ferries has been further shrunk with the sharp fall in water level in the river Jamuna.

Polis manifesto

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on February 11. The BNP chief is also contesting the forthcoming polls from Rajshahi-2 and Sirajganj-2 constituencies. The PM is yet to plan any visit to Bogra-7 from where she has already been elected unopposed.

Meanwhile, the mainstream opposition had announced a dawn-to-dusk hartal in Sirajganj to resist the PM's planned tour there on January 11.

Housing and Public Works Minister Rafiqul Islam, Mia, who attended yesterday's meeting with the PM, told The Daily Star that the party's manifesto was now almost ready for announcement. He, however, added that the announcement would be made shortly.

Asked on the PM's campaign tour, Rafiq, also a member of the BNP standing committee, said she would go to selected areas only. The minister also denied press reports on the PM's scheduled visits to Chittagong and Rajshahi where the opposition parties had already planned to resist the visits. She did not have any such plan as reported by the press," he said.

Meanwhile, the Prime Minister is likely to address an election rally in the city before the polls.

The Midnight File

Kabariti Jordan's new PM
AMMAN, Feb 4: Foreign Minister Abdel Karim Kabariti was appointed today to replace Zaid Ibn Zaker as Jordan's Prime Minister and tasked with forming a new government, the royal palace announced, reports AFP.

FBCCI chief for devaluation of taka

FBCCI president Salman F Rahman yesterday strongly advocated devaluation of the taka following the downward currency adjustments by the neighbours to remain competitive in the world market, reports UNB.

"India has recently adjusted its currency to Rs 37 from Rs 32 a dollar, but our currency remained at nearly the same level for long. How can we compete with them?" he told a gathering in the evening.

Addressing an iftar party in the auditorium of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Rahman said the macro-stability started sliding because of a staggering political impasse and the economy was signalling another spell of stagnation.

He said inflation neared double digit, foreign exchange reserve eroded to below the level of three months' import payment capacity and, both trade and fiscal deficits widened in recent months.

The recent government measures taken to tame the growing inflation by squeezing credit may result in a drop in growth of gross domestic product (GDP) this year, Rahman said.

The FBCCI chief also noticed increased spendings in public sector while the state-owned establishments continued to incur loss to the tune of Tk 2,500 crore a year, creating strains on exchequer.

Sensing a "very very serious situation" in future, he blamed the present political situation for the downside in economy. The condition would not improve until a new government takes over through a credible election contested by all, he said.

Rahman, who recently floated a political pressure group called Samridha Bangladesh Andolan, said the business community for long had been pressing for a suitable environment to tap the opportunities unfolded by the free market economy.

Special launch service for Eid

The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has arranged special launch services during Eid holidays, reports BSS.

These launches will be operated before, during and after the Eid holidays from February 13 through February 23 on various routes.

According to a BIWTA press release, special launch services will ply on the following routes:

Dhaka-Bhola, Dhaka-Barisal, Dhaka-Bandura, Dhaka-Barguna, Dhaka-Chandpur, Dhaka-Ichuli, Dhaka-Madaripur, Dhaka-Sureswar, Dhaka-Kalaya, Dhaka-Torkey, Dhaka-Borhanuddin, Narayanganj-Chandpur, Narayanganj-Munshinganj, Narayanganj-Taltala, Narayanganj-Ramchandrapur, Narayanganj-Machukhal, Narayanganj-Sukhsar, Narayanganj-Torkey, Narayanganj-Motlab-Bangla.

4 get life term

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The case in brief is that the victim, Nuruzzaman Dullal, a BA examinee was on his way back to the college hostel on the night of May 23, 1993. When he reached near the hostel gate, the accused persons attacked him with sharp weapons. He succumbed to his injuries at the Sylhet Medical College Hospital.

The convicted persons are, Delwar Hossain Dlu, Apil Uddin, Shah Mustakim Ali Sagar, all absconding and Abdul Momin.

DU gunfight

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teargas shells only after the fight was over.

At one stage the BCL activists left for Salmullah Hall area in the face of heavy counter-fire, from towards the Surja Sen Hall area. Later, the JCD activists returned to the venue of BCL's rally and burnt a banner and damaged the microphones.

Witnesses said, angry JCD activists assaulted a number of photo-journalists when they were taking photographs of the burnt and damaged articles.

During the gunfight, general students ran pell mell in panic and some of them, including a number of female students, got hurt while running for safety. A female student who fainted was rushed to the hospital.

The JCD activists later held a rally at the Aparajeo Bangla. They blamed the BCL for the incident.

Anti-polls violence

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union at Ullapara yesterday morning, UNB adds.

Our Pabna Correspondent adds: About 2,000 laminated identity cards were burnt to ashes when the office of the voters' identity card contractors near the district Judge's residence was set on fire at around noon yesterday.

According to witnesses and police, a group of youths suddenly entered Sah Al Printing Press, the ID card contractors, poured petrol all over the place and ignited it with a burning stick.

Cameras and furniture of the office were also damaged in the arson attack. A case has been filed with the Pabna Sadar thana. None was arrested.

Our Natore Correspondent reported that a group of unidentified people set ablaze the district Election Commission office at 8 am yesterday. An official received minor burn injury in the arson.

Some valuable documents were gutted in the fire while telephone lines and fax services were disrupted. Fire brigade later brought the fire under control. The extent of damage could not be ascertained until the writing of this report at around midnight.

Our Sirajganj Correspondent adds: The opposition parties have called a dawn to dusk hartal at Sirajganj town on February 11, protesting the "election campaign" of Prime Minister (PM) Begum Khaleda Zia.

Awami League, Jatiya Party, Jamaat-e-Islami and other parties had called the hartal as the PM, a candidate from Sirajganj-2 (Sadar Constituency), is scheduled to start her election campaign on the day.

A tense situation was prevailing in the town. The district BNP and its front organisations yesterday announced the formation of special squads to ensure a smooth election campaign of the PM.

Pro Awami League Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) and pro BNP Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal (JCD) brought out separate processions in the town yesterday.

A chase and counter-chase took place as the two rival groups clashed on the local Suhrawardy Sarak. No casualties were reported.

In another incident, election posters of a Freedom Party candidate from Sirajganj-5 were set ablaze by unidentified youths near Jamrail railway station under Kamarkhand thana.

Microphones and rickshaws used for election campaign of Barrister Korban Ali, an Islami Shashontantra Andolan candidate, were damaged yesterday by opposition activists near Kaji Khuri under Shahjadpur thana.

Another candidate, Abdul Mannan of Khelefah Andolan, could not address a scheduled public meeting at Chowdhali thana yesterday due to opposition resistance.

Our Sherpur Correspondent adds: BNP supporters called a dawn-to-dusk hartal in the town today protesting the beating up of a BNP candidate in the town yesterday.

The BNP candidate from Sherpur Sadar-1, Md Nazrul Islam, was beaten up by a group of opposition supporters when he came to the town for election campaign at about 12:30 pm yesterday. Nazrul Islam fell to the ground as the youths beat him.

A tense situation is prevailing in the town as the BNP supporters, many of them armed, brought out protest marches as a sequel to the incident. A number of shops were damaged by protesters. Police has been deployed in the town.

BSS reports: An auto-rickshaw was set ablaze by a

group of youths when it was being used for election campaign for BNP nominee from Netrokona-2 at Nihkhilnath here.

The youths, said to be opposition activists, also caused injury to the five occupants of the auto-rickshaw who were using a microphone at the time.

One of the injured was admitted to the Sadar hospital in a critical condition. None could be arrested in this connection.

Our Staff Correspondent from Sylhet reports: At least 10 persons were injured when supporters of a BNP nominee came under attack in Kulaura thana under Moulvibazar district Saturday. Of the injured, four had been admitted into the thana health centre.

The Kulaura thana unit of Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal brought out a silent procession to protest the "planned attack" on the peaceful campaign of BNP nominee MM Shahin at Bhukshimul. A case has been registered.

Meanwhile, the election campaign office of a candidate was burnt at the thana headquarters of Jagannathpur under Sunamganj district yesterday.

A group of people attacked the campaign office of Saidur Rahman Rupa, a nominee of Jatiya Nagorik Sanghati, at about 8 am today. They also set it on fire. Police and neighbours brought the fire under control. A case has been lodged. Saidur Rahman blamed the opposition activists for the incident.

BSS reports from Narayanganj: Ten persons were injured, one of them seriously, in a scuffle during an election campaign for BNP candidate and industrialist Mohammad Ali at Adamjee Jute Mills premises last evening.

According to police, Mohammad Ali's Pajero Jeep came under cocktail attack by anti-election activists who heaped the explosives at the vehicle causing its damage in the rear side.

The incident took place as soon as Mohammad Ali came out of the office at Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal within the mill premises, over one hundred crackers were blasted, Sidderganj police said.

50 injured in Sylhet clash
From Staff Correspondent
SYLHET, Feb 4: About fifty persons were injured in a clash between two rival groups at Kaliganj bazar of Jakiganj thana this afternoon.

Of the injured, five were admitted to the Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital.

The clash took place over taking possession of the land of some shops which were gutted in a fire Thursday night.

Both the groups used lethal weapons.

'8000 missing Bosnians are dead'
BRATUNAC, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Feb 4: Several thousand Bosnian Muslims missing since rebels Serbs overran the UN-designated enclave of Srebrenica last July are dead, UN rapporteur for human rights Elisabeth Rehn said here today, reports AFP.

Rehn said she had been informed by a Serb official in the region, Mireslav Deronac, that the Muslims, numbered at between 3,000 and 8,000 according to different estimates, had been "killed in battle" and were "buried around (the Srebrenica region)."

Benazir urges Al-Faran to free westerners
ISLAMABAD, Feb 4: Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto today appealed to Kashmiri guerrillas holding four westerners to unconditionally free the "innocent" tourists kidnapped more than six months ago, reports AFP.

Benazir made the appeal during a nationally-televised address a day before a government-sponsored country-wide general strike to demonstrate solidarity with Muslim separatist groups fighting against Indian rule in Kashmir.

Rallies have been planned by Pakistani ruling and opposition parties for tomorrow, which has been declared a public holiday throughout the country by the government, as on similar occasions in the past.

The observance this year closely follows a January 26 rocket attack on a mosque on the Pakistani side in Kashmir that left 20 people dead and rekindled mutual tensions. Islamabad has blamed the attack on Indian troops, but New Delhi has denied the accusation.

"During this holy month of Ramadan I call upon the kidnapers to unconditionally release the hostages and put an end to this incident which has harmed the cause of Kashmiris," she said.

"They should release these innocent tourists if they have any love for the Kashmiri people," she said.

Britons Paul Wells, 23, and Keith Mangan, 33, and American Donald Hutchings, 42, were kidnapped by the shadowy Al-Faran group on July 4 while trekking in the Himalayas in the Indian-administered southern two-thirds of Kashmir.

German Drik Hasert was seized on July 8, the same day as Norwegian Hans-Christian Ostro, who was killed by the kidnapers in August.

Al-Faran has demanded the release of 15 imprisoned Muslim militants in exchange for the four hostages, but has not been in contact with the Indian authorities since November 26.

She reiterated Pakistani suspicions about Al-Faran, saying "we do not know whether it is an Indian counter-intelligence unit or a breakaway group of Kashmiri fighters."

She vowed continued support for the Kashmiri "freedom struggle," but said Pakistan was ready for negotiations with India to resolve the Kashmir dispute.

"Every Kashmiri man, woman and child is with their Kashmiri brethren and shall remain with them till our last breath," Benazir said, warning that the sub-continent would not achieve peace until the Kashmir issue is solved.

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