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A Taliban religious militia truck carries Russian-made surface-to-air missiles from Kabul's International Airport to a safer location in Kabul yesterday. The airport was rocketed Monday morning by the ex-government troops positioned 20 Kilometres north of Kabul.

— AFP/UNB photo

#### Ceasefire fails to take place

## Heavy fighting near Kabul

KABUL, Oct 21: Heavy fighting raged north of Kabul today between the Taliban militia and forces loyal to the ousted Afghan government, despite ceasefire proposals, agencies quoting witnesses said.

Forces loyal to the former government's top commander, Ahmad Shah Masood, appeared to be trying to cut a Taliban force off from the Afghan capital, just north of the city, residents said.

Though the warring parties said today they were ready to accept a Pakistani-brokered ceasefire, both sides set conditions to any agreement and were still locked in battle.

On the ground, the two sides continued to fight for territory on the plains north of Kabul, with the Taliban saying they had pushed forces of the ousted Rabbani government out of the village of Kalaikan, 25 km north of Kabul.

However, witnesses put the fighting five kilometres to the south, about where it was on Sunday.

"We are ready for the enforcement of a ceasefire. It depends on the readiness of the

other side, and our condition for a ceasefire is an exchange of prisoners, paving the way for further talks," said Amir Khan Muttaqi, Information Minister of the Taliban, which holds Kabul.

The ceasefire had been due to begin at midday (0730 GMT).

But a spokesman for Ahmad Shah Masood, whose Tajik forces hold territory to within half an hour's drive of the capital, said ceasefire negotiations in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif had failed.

"They [faction leaders] have not agreed on a ceasefire," Masood's spokesman Dr Abdullah Rabbani said in a statement. "They [Taliban] are still bombing, so the ceasefire that was proposed has not taken place."

Abdullah said two Taliban planes dropped bombs on Garabagh village today. Reuters correspondent Chris Bird reported from Jabal os-Siraj, 70 km north of Kabul.

Reporters heard anti-aircraft fire as Masood's forces opened up on jets but there was no word on casualties.

At least eight rockets slammed into the combined military and civilian airport on the northern edge of Kabul.

Meanwhile, the mediation moves by Pak Interior Minister Naserullah Babar — whose government denies charges by the ousted government of president

Rabbani that it supports the Taliban — appeared to overshadow peace efforts by UN special envoy Norbert Holl.

Holl, who launched a fresh peace initiative at a news conference in Kabul today, warned in an apparent reference to Pakistan no single country could bring peace to Afghanistan.

"People may think in Kabul it is more important to follow the advice of other negotiators but in the long run help for reconstruction will only come from the international community," he said after talks with Taliban representatives.

The Organisation of Islamic Conference also entered the peacemaking arena by proposing an OIC-monitored truce and a conference in Saudi Arabia of the warring groups.

Govt won't change law to alter Islamic way of life: Speaker

By Staff Correspondent

Speaker of the Jatiya Sangsad Humayun Rashid Choudhury has said the government would not change any law or provision which may alter the Islamic way of life, reported.

The Speaker now on a visit to Saudi Arabia to perform Umrah told this while he was accorded a reception by the Bangladesh community in Makkah-Al-Mukarramah on Saturday night.

The delegation, headed by LGC chairman Rahmat Ali MP, will leave the country sometime in the last week of this month, sources added.

The delegation will see the composition, powers and functions of the local government bodies in the two countries, the chairman said.

The 8-member Commission is scheduled to prepare a report on a four-tier local government system for the country by the first week of December this year.

The commission is also studying opinions and suggestions of different sections of people, experts and professional groups in the country about the possible structure, functions and powers of the local government system.

Two die in Patuakhali

From Our Correspondent

BARISAL, Oct 21: Two persons died in separate incidents in Kalapara thana of Patuakhali district today.

One Dulal, 20, allegedly committed suicide by insecticide at Khajuria village. He was rushed to hospital where doctors declared him dead.

A family feud was reportedly the cause of the suicide.

In another incident, one Abdur Rashid, 26, died after falling from a tree at Chakamata village.

Portfolios

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cultural affairs, religious affairs, housing and public works, jute and textile, labour and manpower, land and information are being run by the state ministers.

The ministry also said that participation of five companies at the technical evaluation level was enough for a competitive environment, the source pointed out.

"We believe participation of 20 companies at the pre-qualification level was very significant," an official remarked.

#### Dhaka city

From Page 1

the government and the people. Short, medium and long-term plans will be implemented to extend civic amenities to the citizens with the joint efforts of the LGRD Ministry and the City Corporation, he informed the function.

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Printed & Published by A. S. Mahmud, Managing Director, on behalf of Mediaworld Ltd, 52, Motijheel C/A, Dhaka-1000, from City Publishing House Ltd, 90, Kakrail, Dhaka-1000, Editorial, News & Commercial Offices: House No: 11, Road No: 3, Dhanmandi R/A, Dhaka-1205. PABX: 500092-4, Commercial: 500091 (Direct), Fax No: 88-02-863035, GPO Box No: 3257, Cable: DAILYSTAR, DHAKA. Email: dstar@bangla.net

# The Daily Star

## Russian minister in India to revitalise ties

NEW DELHI, Oct 21: Russian Defence Minister Igor Rodionov arrives in India today for a three-day visit that is expected to revitalise a relationship disrupted by the break up of the Soviet Union, reports AP.

India and Russia, military allies for most of the Cold War years, are expected to sign a deal for the sale of 40 sophisticated fighter jets to the Indian Air Force, Press Trust of India news agency reported. India desperately needs the new Sukhoi-30 fighters to modernise and aging fleet.

Rodionov, on his first foreign tour since he was appointed by President Boris Yeltsin in July, is scheduled to meet senior military officials in New Delhi tomorrow and Wednesday.

During these talks, he is expected to discuss the possible sale of Russian ships, including an aircraft carrier, self-propelled artillery guns and other military hardware. Press Trust and defence industry sources said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

India pursued a nonaligned policy during the Cold War, cultivating friends among capitalists and communists. In the chaos that followed the collapse

of the Soviet bloc, the country found suppliers there less able to cope with demand.

India sought other suppliers in the West to overcome an acute shortage of military spare parts, but Western equipment proved expensive and most was not compatible with Russian systems. Fighter aircraft were cannibalised to keep squadrons battle-worthy.

Almost all the Indian army's tanks and artillery were either made or designed in the former Soviet Union. The air force has French and British fighter jets, but depends on a huge fleet of MiG fighters and Antonov and Ilyushin transports and Mi-series helicopters.

Fire at 2 cosmetic shops in city

By Staff Correspondent

Two cosmetic shops at Chankbar caught fire at around 9:15 pm yesterday, said police and fire brigade sources.

The fire that originated from an electric short circuit was brought under control by the fire fighters, said fire service men.

One beaten to death in Barguna

From Staff Correspondent

BARISAL, Oct 21: One person was beaten to death allegedly by his rivals at Uttar Karuna village under Betagi thana of Barisal district today.

Police and witnesses said Abdul Aziz, 35, came out of his house at around 4 pm at the call of some villagers who later took him to the house of one Sekendar Ali. There, the villagers beat Abdul Aziz mercilessly as a result of which he died.

Dr Taimur AK Mahmud, Asstt. Professor of Medicine of Rajshahi Medical College Hospital was assaulted by some extortions when he refused to give them money.

Police today arrested two youths — Shahid Hossain Bulu and Shafiqul Islam in connection with the incident.

The Police Commissioner of Rajshahi, Aminul Islam, today met the leaders of the striking doctors and requested them to call off the strike. But the doctors said they would not withdraw their programme unless the persons responsible for the incident were arrested.

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Protest in NY

Ravi Shanker for withdrawal of charges against MF Hussain

By Staff Correspondent

NEW YORK, Oct 21: Sitar maestro Pandit Ravi Shankar was among more than 30 Indian intellectuals and artists in a demonstration here demanded withdrawal of obscenity charges against renowned painter MF Hussain initiated by the Maharashtra Government, reports PTI.

The protesters strongly condemned what they called vicious communal campaign against Hussain and a deliberately distorted interpretation of his works.

They also asked the Gujarat government to take legal action against the Bajrang Dal hoodlums who destroyed the artist's work in Ahmedabad.

The Indian government, they said, must clearly condemn that act and declare that the forces who are charging up communal passions for political ends would not be tolerated.

The art world denies that right of any group or individual to dictate what we create, they added.

The demonstration held in Grey Art Gallery of the University of New York was also attended by Ustad Ashish Khan, Deepi Naval, Madhu Jaffrey and Zia Jaffrey.

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