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Clinton may skip Pakistan during South Asia tour?

WASHINGTON, Jan 29: US President Bill Clinton may skip Pakistan during his upcoming South Asia visit citing new security issues, a media report said today, reports PTI.

A White House official, speaking on condition of anonymity, insisted that a visit to Pakistan is still an open question and an announcement on a visit to South Asia would be made soon, the Washington Times said.

However, it quoted James Clad, professor of Asian Studies at Georgetown University, as saying that Clinton had been told by the secret service that his personal security could not be guaranteed inside Pakistan, where tens of thousands of armed militants had issued threats against the US.

The secret service, Clad said, has told the White House that any normal visit through the streets was extremely problematic from a security point of view.

The White House declined to confirm Clad's assertion.

However, some analysts have speculated that Clinton, anxious to be a peacemaker between India and Pakistan, might choose to make a stopover in Islamabad and meet General Pervez Musharraf in the airport's VIP lounge.

Passage likely today

Public safety law may take tougher turn

By Nazmul Ashraf

The Public Safety Act, likely to be passed today, may have tougher provisions than originally proposed in the bill placed in parliament Thursday with a more stringent time frame for trial.

The original provisions left some scope for extension of trial time beyond 120 days (which included an extended period of 30 days after failure to complete in 90 days), but the latest changes would make it mandatory to complete in 90 days.

The parliamentary standing committee on home ministry suggested the changes in its report submitted in the House yesterday.

The committee moved unusually fast in scrutinising the bill and finalising its report.

After introduction of the bill on Thursday, it went to the committee which sat on Friday and presented its printed report to the House yesterday morning. The government printing press worked all night Friday to make sure the report was printed before the House began business the following morning.

While the home ministry committee worked on the Public Safety (Special Provisions) Act, 2000, the women and children affairs committee acted at equal speed to finalise its report on the 'The Women and Children

Repression Prevention Act, 2000'. The second report was also submitted in the House yesterday.

Both bills, introduced in the House on Thursday, were sent to the standing committees on the same day.

The public safety bill, as it was on Thursday, had a provision that the tribunal would have the authority to grant bail to the accused by adjourning trial and send a reference about the adjournment as well as the bail to the appeal court in the following 15 days if trial was not completed in 90 days. The appeal court, on receipt of the reference, would order resumption of trial and that the tri-

bunal would decide if the bail would continue or not for the sake of trial.

Now, after the changes proposed by the committee, the case would not be referred to the appeal court. This means that the proposed law says nothing about what would happen if the trial court fails to dispose of the case in the stipulated time.

Opposition BNP members gave notes of dissent on various provisions of the controversial Public Safety Bill and walked out of the meeting after being voted down. However, changes to the women and children act received backing from BNP MPs.

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Opposition calls 36-hour hartal from Feb 2

The opposition has called a 36-hour countrywide hartal starting at 6 am on February 2 against the government move for enacting the Public Safety Bill, reports UNB.

The liaison committee of the four-party alliance took the decision at a meeting yesterday evening. BNP secretary general Abdul Mannan Bhuiyan presided over the meeting. JP secretary general Nazimul Rahman Manzur, Jamaat secretary general Maulana Matmur Rahman Nizami and IOJ secretary general Mufi Fazul Huq Amine attended the meeting held at 29 Minto Road.

Bhuiyan announced the hartal programme at a press briefing saying that they came to know that the Public Safety Bill would be passed in parliament today.

He said the hartal pro-

gramme was finalised taking into consideration the Biswa Ijtema that will continue till January 31.

The four parties will stage demonstration at divisional and district headquarters on Monday to protest the 'black law' designed to repress political opponents.

The alliance has postponed a mass procession scheduled for February 3.

Condemning the move, the BNP secretary general said the government still has time to withdraw the bill and avert dire consequences.

Maulana Nizami told a reporter that the alliance would withdraw February 2-3 hartal if the government withdraws the Public Safety Bill.

Bhuiyan said all the political parties, human rights or-

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Talks on water sharing of Teesta 6 other rivers begin in city

The first day of the two-day secretary-level meeting of Bangladesh-India Joint Committee of Experts (JCE) yesterday initiated discussion on sharing of waters of the Teesta and six other common rivers, reports BSS.

Water Resources Secretary Dr ATM Shamsul Huda and his Indian counterpart Zafrul Hasan led their respective delegations at the closed-door meeting held at Hotel Sonargaon.

Sources close to the meeting said the talks were held on sharing of waters of the Teesta and six other common rivers — Moru, Khowai, Gumti, Muhuri, Dharla and Dudkumar. The talks end today.

The JCE, formed following the signing of Indo-Bangladesh water accord on December 12, 1996, was authorised to look into the problems of water sharing and work out the modalities for this.

The outcome of the JCE meeting would be placed before the next meeting of the Joint River Commission (JRC), which is likely to be held in Dhaka within four months.

TSC victim to identify culprits at court today

By Staff Correspondent

The victim of sexual assault during the New Year's celebrations at TSC will be produced before the Chief Metropolitan Magistrate's Court today for identifying the culprits.

At least 10 people including the accused will also be produced before the court to enable the victim to pick out the culprits, according to police sources.

Fazlul Huq Russel and Khan Mesbahul Alam Tutul, students of Dhaka University who are also leaders of Bangladesh Chhatra League were earlier identified by the victim as the main accused in the assault.

Police arrested four including Mamun and Mokhtar, book traders in the city's Nikhri area who claim to have saved the victim on the night of the incident.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Society for Enforcement of Human Rights (BSEHR) accused police of weakening the case regarding the sexual assault at TSC and protecting the main accused.

Quoting the findings of the five-member team of the BSEHR, Alina Khan said Mamun and Mokhtar detained by the police were found innocent.

Contriving of the confessional statement of the victim who lodged the FIR has also weakened the case, she alleged adding that the accused would benefit from the gap between

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Public Safety Law It can be used against us when we are in opposition, says PM

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina inaugurated the Dhaka International Trade Fair in the city yesterday asking the businessmen to take advantage of liberal government policy to increase investment, production and export, reports UNB.

"We are trying to create the best possible investment climate by establishing peaceful atmosphere in the country," she said expressing determination of the government to ensure safety and security of the people.

Missing businessman found dead

By Staff Correspondent

The body of the young businessman who was missing since January 16 from old part of the capital city was found in Sankharia thana of Chittagong on Friday.

Relatives identified the dead as Mohsin Mridha, a businessman of Bhaja Hari Shah Street in old part of the city.

They suspected Mohsin, father of a boy, was abducted and killed following a business feud.

Concentrating more on the Public Safety Bill awaiting passage in parliament, the Prime Minister said the government is going to ensure security of life and property of the people and create a climate conducive for investment.

Addressing the inaugural meeting of DITF at Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, she said for ensuring speedy trial and to punish the real culprits, the government is enacting Public Safety Law and Women and Children Repression Prevention Law.

Finance Minister Shah A M S Kibria, Commerce Minister Abdul Jalil, FBCCI president Abdul Awal Mintoo, acting commerce secretary Golam Rahman and Export Promotion Bureau vice-chairman A B Chowdhury also addressed the function.

Hasina said criminals and terrorists have no colour or creed. They must be punished. From the beginning, the government is taking strict steps against the culprits and arrested the terrorists.

But the lengthy process of trial and loopholes of law gave advantage to the criminals of securing release on bail and again involve in heinous

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Devotees continued to pour in at Biswa Ijtema that began on the bank of the river Turag at Tongi yesterday. — Star photo

Ijtema begins, 3 more devotees die

TONGI, Gazipur, Jan 29: Biswa Ijtema, the world's second largest Muslim congregation after the holy Hajj, began here on the bank of the river Turag after Fajr prayers today, reports UNB.

Tens of thousands of devotees from home and abroad are taking part in the congregation that began through religious sermons by renowned Islamic thinkers. Apart from Bangladesh participants, some 4,000 devotees from 55 countries have so far joined the Ijtema.

Moulana Ibrahim of India delivered the sermons after Fajr prayers on the opening day. He was followed by Sheikh Khalifa of Saudi Arabia after Zohr prayers, Moulana Mahmudul Haq of Bangladesh and Moulana Ahmed and Moulana Hatij Jubayer of Delhi after Magrib prayers. Moulana Abdur Rahim and Moulana Jubayer translated the sermons into Arabic and Urdu for the foreign devotees.

The drizzling caused sufferings to the devotees under the huge pandal. Roads and passages became muddy and slippery disrupting movement of lakhs of participants of the Ijtema.

Like previous years, marriage without dowry will be solemnized at the main dais on Sunday after Asr prayers and special prayers will be offered for peaceful conjugal life of the new couples.

Meanwhile, three more devotees died today raising the total number of deaths to six at the Ijtema venue.

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Prayer Timings

January 30

| | Azan | Jamaat |
|---------|-------|--------|
| Fajr | 5-45 | 6-15 |
| Zohr | 12-15 | 1-20 |
| Asr | 4-15 | 4-30 |
| Maghrib | 5-46 | 5-48 |
| Esha | 7-15 | 7-45 |

Source: Islamic Foundation

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'Indo-Bangla ties should grow on mutual respect'

By Staff Correspondent

Eight former foreign secretaries and the incumbent at a Roundtable in the city yesterday emphasised the need for improving relations with India on the basis of mutual respect.

Most of them were critical of India's 'big brotherly' attitude and its unwillingness to resolve major issues like land and maritime boundary demarcations, exchange of enclaves, water sharing, removal of trade gap and ratification of the 1974 Indo-Bangladesh agreement.

All of them were, however, unanimous on strengthening regional cooperation and said the SAARC should be made more effective and dynamic for improving the lot of 1.2 billion people of its seven member countries.

The Roundtable on

'Bangladesh-India Relations: Present and Future' was organised by Bangla daily The Prothom Alo and held at Hotel Sheraton.

Foreign Secretary C M Shafi Sami and eight former foreign secretaries took part in the nearly six-hour lively discussion while Editor of The Prothom Alo Matmur Rahman moderated it.

The diplomats stressed the need for consensus among the major political parties in Bangladesh, especially the ruling Awami League and the BNP, about relations with India.

They observed that the major parties, when in the opposition, take anti-Indian stance and even make irresponsible statements for temporary gain.

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BGMEA president says

Free quota to help increase export, benefit small units

By Rafiq Hasan

BGMEA President Anisur Rahman Sinha has said that free quota system would help increase garments export and a large number of small factories survive.

"There is a large number of small factories in the country which do not get adequate export orders for continuing their operation throughout the year. These factories are benefited if

they get allocation under free quota," he said.

"Considering the financial condition of those factories, five per cent free quota in garments export to the US and Canada should continue," he suggested while talking to The Daily Star.

The government had earlier cancelled free quota system

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