# Indian political parties agree to discuss mosque row

NEW DELHI, Dec 12: India's political parties appeared to have broken a seven-day parliamentary deadlock today, when they agreed to discuss plans to build a temple on the ruins of a mosque razed by Hindu zealots in 1992, reports AFP.

Following an all-party meeting called by the Speaker of the lower house, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan said the issue would be debated on Wednesday.

"It was agreed upon that there will be a discussion ... immediately after question hour," Mahajan said.

Both houses of the Indian parliament have been paralysed for seven straight days, with opposition MPs clamouring for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to resign over remarks he made that were seen as supporting the Hindu temple construction drive.

They have also been calling for the resignation of three ministers -- including Home Minister L.K. Advani -- who were present at the mosque's destruction eight years ago and charged with inciting the crowds.

The razing of the Babri Masjid mosque in the northern town of Ayodhya triggered widespread Hindu-Muslim clashes that claimed thousands of lives.

Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist BJP party and its right-wing Hindu affiliates have long been associated with the Ayodhya row and the highly controversial campaign to build a new Ram temple on the disputed site.

Although promoting the temple reconstruction drive is official BJP policy, the party leadership has in recent years played down the issue for fear of antagonising its more secular partners in the coalition government.

However, on the eighth anniversary of the mosque's destruction last week, Vajpayee let his moderate mask slip slightly as he told reporters that the temple campaign was an "unfinished" national task.

The Times of India on Tuesday said Vajpayee's remarks were aimed at appeasing the right-wing Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP, World Hindu Council).

The Times quoted senior VHP officials as saying they would launch a temple-building campaign in January during the Kumbh Mela, a major Hindu pilgrimage.

"Yes, we have finalised the programme and it will be announced in January by senior Hindu 'sadhus' (holy men) at the Kumbh Mela," VHP vice-president Vishnu Hari Dalmia told AFP.

"We hope it will be the biggest and grandest temple in India. Artisans have been working for seven years on the pillars but it will take five to seven years to complete the temple. It will cost at least 200 million rupees (4.3 million dollars)."

Dalmia confirmed that Vajpayee was aware of the VHP's plans.

Renuka Choudhury, a spokeswoman for the main opposition Congress party, which unsuccessfully tried to move a motion of censure in parliament on Monday, said the opposition would not let Vajpayee off the hook.

"We are not trying to topple the government but we will not let him slip away. He has to explain what he means by saying such outrageous things," she told AFP.

"The PM's statements are dangerous ... and it is widely known that attacks against (religious) minorities have increased, especially against Muslims, since he came to power."

US President Bill Clinton(L), First Lady and US Senator-elect Hillary Clinton(C), and their daughter Chelsea(R) get down from Air Force One early yesterday after arriving at Dublin International Airport, Ireland, to start a three-day trip to Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Great Britain. --AFP Photo

# 'Pak regime has no plan to revive parliament'

ISLAMABAD, Dec 12 : Pakistan's military government has no plan to restore the suspended parliament after exiling ousted prime minister Nawaz Sharif, a report said today, says AFP.

"This is all kite flying that with the exile of Nawaz Sharif the government will consider or is considering the restoration of assemblies," government spokesman Major General Rashid Qureshi told the Dawn daily.

Qureshi, press secretary to military ruler General Pervez Musharraf, said general elections would be held in 2002 according to plan.

"There is no such thing like restoring assemblies on the cards," he said.

Sharif, along with 19 close relatives, started a life of exile in Saudi Arabia on Sunday after he was pardoned from lengthy prison terms for hijacking and terrorism.

The shock announcement raised speculation that Musharraf might consider resurrecting the bicameral parliament that he suspended when he seized power in October last year.

"I think the military government may try for a safe exit while keeping control of the future democratic set-up," former Sindh provincial governor Fakhruddin G. Embrahim said Monday.

Others said Sharif's removal had nullified any lingering threat he may have posed to the regime, allowing Musharraf to speed up his plan to hold elections by October 12, 2002.

"I think the government has two things in mind, restoration of the suspended assemblies or fresh elections," Pakistan Muslim League central leader Raja Zafarul Haq said.

"They should give some direction otherwise people will start saying the army wants to prolong its tenure."

Meanwhile, the media and political circles continued to criticise the "deal" leading to Sharif's release, demanding that other detained politicians under investigation or trial for corruption should get the same treatment.

The government has said it would consider releasing former prime minister Benazir Bhutto's jailed husband Asif Zardari, a former senator, if he requested clemency and surrendered his assets like Sharif. But Benazir's Pakistan People's Party has rejected the offer.

# Junta to free Suu Kyi from house arrest

VIENTIANE, Laos, Dec 12: A European Union minister praised Myanmar's military junta on Tuesday for agreeing to free opposition leader Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest and to allow an EU delegation to meet with the Nobel laureate next month, reports AP.

"There is much to be done, but I am encouraged by their response," said John Battle, the British minister of state for Commonwealth, calling the agreement a major breakthrough in the political standoff in Myanmar.

His statement came as European and Southeast Asian countries ended landmark talks Tuesday, meeting each other halfway on the contentious issue of human rights in Myanmar and agreeing to strengthen their flagging trade ties.

The two-day talks between the European Union and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations were dominated by Myanmar, which faces widespread criticism for imposing severe restrictions on political activity.

The past few months have seen international pressure building on Myanmar's junta, particularly after Suu Kyi and eight other top leaders of her opposition National League for Democracy were confined to their homes in September after she tried to travel to the countryside to do political organising. Six of them, not including Suu Kyi were freed on Dec 1.

Earlier this month, US President Bill Clinton gave Suu Kyi the highest US civilian award, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, for her peaceful struggle for democracy and human rights.

## US resident jailed in China

BEIJING, Dec 12 : China jailed a US resident for three years today on spying charges after she exposed the detention of members of the banned Falungong spiritual group in mental hospitals, a senior US diplomat said, reports AFP.

Teng Chunyan, 37, was convicted of revealing matters of national security to foreigners, said the diplomat.

Teng, a New York-based acupuncturist who is married to a US citizen, is the first overseas member of the Falungong to be put on trial in China.

The US State Department last week called her trial on spying charges "deeply disturbing" and urged the Chinese authorities to release her.

Teng was accused of stealing, prying into, buying and illegally providing state intelligence, according to an indictment obtained by the Information Center for Human Rights and Democracy in Hong Kong.

The center said Teng was sentenced at a secret hearing at Beijing Intermediate People's Court on Tuesday following a trial on November 23.

# Clinton, Barak discuss election, ME violence

WASHINGTON, Dec 12: President Bill Clinton and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak spoke by telephone for about 30 minutes on Monday as the Israeli leader explained his surprise announcement this past weekend that he would resign and stand for reelection in 60 days, reports Reuters.

White House spokesman PJ Crowley said Barak initiated the call, which also touched on continuing violence in the West Bank and Gaza, a US-led inquiry into the roots of the 10-week-old crisis, and a congressional aid package.

"The prime minister initiated the call. He wanted to explain to the president his reasoning for proceeding with elections," Crowley told reporters traveling with Clinton as he headed for a farewell visit to Dublin, Belfast and London.

White House officials have described Barak's decision as an internal matter, a characterisation that stuck after Monday's telephone conversation between the two leaders.

Asked whether Clinton was satisfied with Barak's explanation for calling new elections, Crowley said, "It's not whether we were satisfied or not. It was a political judgment that the prime minister made and an internal matter."

After Barak's announcement, the Clinton administration vowed to continue its efforts to work toward a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians.

The White House was caught off guard by Barak's decision to resign. The move could give Barak a fresh mandate to tackle what he called the country's "emergency situation."

In their conversation on Monday, Crowley said Barak and Clinton also discussed "the situation on the ground and the peace process." Clinton has repeatedly intervened to try to halt the violence, but to no avail.

Barak told Clinton he had spoken earlier on Monday with former US senator George Mitchell, who is leading a five-member team that is investigating the worst Israeli-Palestinian violence since the 1989-1993 Intifada.

Clinton and Barak also discuss a $750 million Middle Eastern aid package which Congress is considering. The package includes $450 million in funds for Israel, $225 million for Egypt and $75 million for Jordan.

Clinton told Barak he would "continue to work hard to support that aid package in the current Congress," Crowley said.

More than 300 people have been killed in 10 weeks of violence, almost all of them Palestinians. Thirty-eight Israelis have also died.

## Sharif in good health

RIYADH, Dec 12: Pakistan's former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, was quoted today as saying he was in good health and high spirits after undergoing medical tests in exile in Saudi Arabia, reports Reuters.

Sharif, 51, told the Saudi daily Okaz that he underwent medical tests on Monday at a hospital in the Red Sea port of Jeddah but declined to discuss his exile.

"I am in good health, my morale is high and the tests were satisfactory," said Sharif, who had complained of heart problems in the past month while in detention in Pakistan.

Okaz said the comments were Sharif first public remarks since he arrived in Saudi Arabia on Sunday for an indefinite exile after being released by the army which overthrew him 14 months ago.

It said Sharif would stay in Jeddah for a few days before flying to the capital Riyadh to continue treatment.

The paper said Sharif expressed his gratitude to King Fahd and Crown Prince Abdullah for agreeing to let him come to the kingdom for medical treatment.

Qatar's satellite television station al-Jazeera said the deal to release Sharif had been brokered by Saudi Arabia and Qatar and that envoys from both countries had met Pakistan's military ruler, General Pervez Musharraf, in the days before Sharif was flown to Saudi Arabia.


বিআইডব্লিউটিসি

বাংলাদেশ অভ্যন্তরীণ নৌ-পরিবহণ কর্পোরেশন
(অভ্যন্তরীণ জাহাজ চলাচল প্রতিষ্ঠান)
৫, দিলকুশা বাণিজ্যিক এলাকা, ঢাকা-১০০০

দুর্ঘটনামুক্ত নৌ-চলাচল ও নিরাপদ যাত্রী সেবা প্রদান করিতে বিআইডব্লিউটিসি অংগীকারাবদ্ধ

টেন্ডার বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বিষয়ঃ উপকূলীয় তৈলজাত দ্রব্যবাহী চলমান ট্যাংকার, লেইড-আপ ট্যাংকার ও পণ্য বাহী লেইড-আপ কোস্টার চার্টার প্রদান বিজ্ঞপ্তি

বাংলাদেশ অভ্যন্তরীণ নৌ-পরিবহণ কর্পোরেশন (বিআইডব্লিউটিসি) কর্তৃক উপকূলীয় ২ (দুই) টি চলমান ট্যাংকার মাসিক ভাড়ায় ২ (দুই) বৎসর কালীন মেয়াদের জন্য এবং অপর ৩ (তিন) টি লেইড-আপ ট্যাংকার ও ৪ (চার) টি লেইড-আপ কোস্টার যেখানে যে অবস্থায় রহিয়াছে উহার ভিত্তিতে মাসিক ভাড়ায় ৫ (পাঁচ) বৎসর মেয়াদের জন্য চার্টার প্রদানের নিমিত্ত সীলমোহরকৃত দরপত্র আহ্বান করা যাইতেছে।

বিস্তারিত শর্তাবলীসহ দরপত্রের সিডিউল অত্র কর্পোরেশনের প্রধান কার্যালয়ের ৩য় তলায় অবস্থিত হিসাব বিভাগের ক্যাশ শাখা, সহ-মহাব্যবস্থাপক (বাণিজ্য), বিআইডব্লিউটিসি, ১৮, ষ্ট্রান্ড রোড, সদর ঘাট, চট্টগ্রাম ও সহ-মহাব্যবস্থাপক (বাণিজ্য), বিআইডব্লিউটিসি, রেলওয়ে হসপিটাল রোড, খুলনা কার্যালয় হইতে নগদ ১,০০০/- (এক হাজার) টাকার (অফেরতযোগ্য) বিনিময়ে সকল কার্যদিবসে অফিস চলাকালীন সময়ে ক্রয় করা যাইবে। দরপত্র আগামী ০৮/১/২০০১ইং বেলা ১২:০০ ঘটিকা পর্যন্ত নিম্নস্বাক্ষরকারীর অফিসে রক্ষিত টেন্ডার বাক্সে গ্রহণ করা হইবে এবং ঐ দিনই ১২:৩০ ঘটিকায় উপস্থিত দরদাতাদের সম্মুখে (যদি কেহ উপস্থিত থাকেন) খোলা হইবে। দরপত্র খোলার দিনে ক্রয়কৃত টেন্ডার সিডিউল গ্রহণযোগ্য হইবে না। কোন কারন প্রদর্শণ ব্যতিরেকেই যে কোন বা সকল দরপত্র গ্রহণ বা বাতিল করার ক্ষমতা কর্তৃপক্ষ সংরক্ষণ করে।

বিআইডব্লিউটিসি/জস/৪১/২০০০-২০০১
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এ জেড এম কামালউদ্দিন
মহা-ব্যবস্থাপক (বাণিজ্য)


# Estrada admitted transfer of illegal funds

## Journalist testifies at corruption trial

MANILA, Dec 12 : President Joseph Estrada admitted illegal gambling money had been deposited in a bank account run by his lawyer, a journalist testified at the embattled Philippine leader's corruption trial today, reports AFP.

Twink Macaraig, Manila correspondent of Singapore-based television network Channel News Asia, submitted to the trial excerpts of the news conference at which he said Estrada made the comments.

In excerpts read out by Macaraig, Estrada admitted some 200 million pesos (four million dollars) in proceeds from the illegal lottery called "jueteng" were deposited in a bank account of a private foundation for Muslim scholars.

It had been reported earlier that one of Estrada's lawyers, Edward Serapio, was the corporate secretary of a charitable foundation for young Muslim graduates set up by the president when he came to power in 1998.

Estrada acknowledged at the news conference that Serapio had accepted the money but said he had done so in good faith, the excerpts recounted.

Macaraig's testimony said the money deposited in the account was intended as a bribe offered by his principal accuser, provincial governor Luis Singson.

Singson, a self confessed bagman for the president, had alleged in October that Estrada took bribes from "jueteng" bosses.

His allegation is the heart of corruption charges Estrada is facing in the Senate.

The House of Representatives impeached Estrada for alleged corruption last month, automatically elevating the case to the Senate.

If the Senate convicts Estrada, he will be thrown out of power.

Estrada's lawyers had tried to block Macaraig's testimony, saying it was "prejudicial" to the president, but presiding officer Supreme Court chief justice Hilario Davide overruled the motion.

Estrada had admitted in the news conference last month that the alleged bribe money was kept intact in the foundation's bank account but he did not report the matter to the police.

The president had said that as he had already ordered the police to crack down on illegal gambling, they should have investigated the matter.

Furthermore, Estrada said, he was busy with his other presidential duties.

Macaraig, who was among those who asked Estrada questions during the press conference, hosted by the Foreign Correspondent's Association of the Philippines in November, testified to the authenticity of the excerpts saying she had a "very vivid recollection" of the event.

## Eldest brother of Mahathir dies

KUALA LUMPUR, Dec 12 : Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad paid last respects to his eldest brother Mahadi Mohamad who died today aged 86, Bernama news agency reported, says AFP.

Mahadi died after a fall in the bathroom of his home at Sungai Petani in the northwestern state of Kedah, his niece said.

The premier was joined by his wife Siti Hasmah Mohd, his other brother Mashahor and his sisters Rafeah and Habsah in paying respects.

## US marine aircraft crashes

JACKSONVILLE, NC, Dec 12: A US Marine Corps MV-22 Osprey with four crewmen on board crashed on Monday during a night-training mission in coastal North Carolina, the second crash involving one of the new tilt-rotor aircraft this year, the Marine Corps said, reports Reuters.

Military and civilian rescue workers, along with rescue helicopters from the Marine Corps New River Air Station, were trying to reach the crash site in a remote wooded area near Jacksonville, a statement from the air base said.